

F I V E

N^o 5.

S E R M O N S,

DEDICATED TO THE

Young Gentlemen Students

IN THE

UNIVERSITY OF *DUBLIN*:

In which are occasionally laid open,

The SOURCE of Ancient and Modern
HERESY:

And the REMEDY against all CONTROVERSIAL
DISPUTES in RELIGION.

D U B L I N:

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NOTICE

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TO THE
Young Gentlemen Students
IN THE
UNIVERSITY of *DUBLIN*,

GENTLEMEN,



THE Reason of this ADDRESS, in presenting You with the few Leaves which contain the following Discourses, does arise from the Prospect, that many of You will succeed to the Sacred Office of the Ministry, in the established Church of these Kingdoms: And the Purpose of it, is not only to intreat Your Acceptance of them, with favourable Allowances for what Defects may be found in their Style, or Method of Composition, which, in Performances of this Sort, are Matters of

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less Weight: But, as the Design of them is to preclude all Considerations of any other Authority, in deciding upon Matters of Religion or Morality, but what is derived from the Holy Scriptures, this Application is also made, to engage your Attention, to examine, with Care and Circumspection, whether the Arguments in them are fairly and clearly deduced from the Word of God: And if, in this Respect, they are approved, that You would conspire, by Your Endeavours to the like Purpose, to recover and restore the Authority due to the Word of God, by receiving it with Reverence from the Holy Scriptures, and bringing forth the Sacred Truth of our Holy Religion, as it is delivered in them; *rightly dividing the Word of Truth* from the Words of Men, and from all impure Mixtures of it with human Wisdom or Learning, by whomsoever they are introduced.

With my sincere Wishes for Your Success,

I am,

GENTLEMEN,

Your most humble Servant,

Nov. 25, 1760.

J---- S----



SERMON I.

J O B xxviii. 28.

*And unto Man be said, the Fear of the Lord
that is Wisdom, and to depart from Evil is
Understanding.*



N the first Part of this Chapter we have a sublime Description of the Knowledge and Abilities of Men, in discovering by their Searches, the hidden Treasures of the Earth; from whence, through their Industry, and great Skill in mechanick Arts and Contrivances, they can command and bring them forth for their Use, to be applied in the various Ornaments and Conveniencies of civil Life : And to this Purpose the inspired Author begins, in
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setting forth their Skill in the Search after those precious Metals, which are most esteemed in the World. *Surely there is a Vein for the Silver, and a Place for Gold, where they find it : Iron is taken out of the Earth, and Brass is molten out of the Stone.* And in seeking after these Treasures, by digging deep in the Earth, and carrying Light into those Caverns which he hath made, the Artificer *setteth an End to Darknefs, and searcheth out all Perfection; the Stones of Darknefs, and the Shadow of Death.* In Prosecution of these Discoveries in the Bowels of the Earth, *the Flood breaketh out from the Inhabitant ;* or, more literally, from and about the Stranger, or strange Inhabitant in those dark Regions ; yet, by his Contrivances, *they are dried up, they are gone away from Men,* who are employed there. *As for the Earth, out of it cometh Bread,* by the Labour of Man ; *and under it is turned up, as it were, Fire,* in the Tillage of it. *The Stones of it are the Place of Sapphires ; and it hath Dust of Gold.*

There is a Path which no Fowl knoweth, and which the Vulture's Eye hath not seen ; the Lion's Whelps have not trodden it, nor the fierce Lion passed by it ; so far does the Skill of Man surpass the Power of all other Creatures of the Earth in Prosecution of his Purposes, that he can easily remove those Obstacles out of the Way, which are unsurmountable to them ; for he *putteth forth his Hand upon the Rock ; he overturneth the Mountains by the Roots ; he cutteth out Rivers among the Rocks, and his Eye seeth every precious Thing : He bindeth the Floods from overflowing ; and the Thing that is hid bringeth he forth to light.*

But,

But, notwithstanding his great Abilities and Success, in executing these Wonders, by his Knowledge in Mechanick Powers and Inventions; there is yet some greater Excellency it concerns him to seek after, which however it is impossible for him to attain unto by his utmost Industry and Experience, and the most diligent Search he can make to find it among all the Treasures of this World; *But where shall Wisdom be found? And where is the Place of Understanding?* From whence the Author proceeds, in Terms yet more elevated and sublime, to describe the inestimable Value of it, *Man knoweth not the Price thereof*—it is high above his Comprehension; *neither is it found in the Land of the Living*. No Man of himself is able to discover it, after the most diligent Consideration, and Searches made through all the Works of Nature; *the Depth saith, it is not in me, and the Sea saith, it is not with me; it cannot be gotten for Gold, neither shall Silver be weighed for the Price thereof; it cannot be valued with the Gold of Ophir, with the precious Onyx or the Sapphire; the Gold and the Chrystal cannot equal it; and the exchange of it shall not be for Jewels of fine Gold, no mention shall be made of Coral, or of Pearls; for the Price of Wisdom is above Rubies. The Topaz of Ethiopia shall not equal it, neither shall it be valued with pure Gold. Whence then cometh Wisdom? And where is the Place of Understanding? Seeing it is hid from all living, and kept close from the Fowls of the Air. Destruction and Death say, we have heard the Fame thereof with our Ears. They have heard, as the Lord spake by his Prophet concerning it, O Death I will be thy Plagues, O Grave I will be thy Destruction; and therefore to put an End to this Enquiry after Wisdom,*

to which no Creature upon Earth cou'd give an Answer, the Holy Spirit hath informed us, that *God understandeth the Way thereof, and he knoweth the Place thereof.* Such is the incomprehensible Extent of his Wisdom and Knowledge, that all created Beings are under one View in his Sight, and were fitted by his Appointment to all the various Purposes of their Existence; *For he looketh to the Ends of the Earth, and seeth under the whole Heaven; to make a Weight for the Winds, and he weigheth the Waters by Measure; when he made a Decree for the Rain, and a Way for the Lightening of the Thunder; then did he see it and declare it; he prepared it yea and searched it out; and unto Man he said, to him only as capable of knowing his Maker, and of obeying his Will declared to him, to retain him in this Excellency and Dignity of his Nature, unto Man, he said, the Fear of the Lord that is Wisdom, and to depart from Evil is Understanding.*

From these Words, and the Manner by which they are introduced, we are taught to apprehend,

1. That the distinguishing Excellence and Dignity of our Nature, is to be derived from our Observance of what God has said unto Man,

2. That the Design of his Instructions is to make us wise by fearing him, to depart from Evil.

Among all those Distempers which we have contracted by Disobedience to the Will of God, there is none more common or remarkable in our Nature than Pride; which is a Spiritual Disease or Malady, that derives it's Birth from our own Imagination of some real Excellence belonging to our Nature, which we are fain to suppose cannot be lost or forfeited by transgressing

transgressing the Command of our Maker. Upon this Presumption we are apt to conceive, that we are capable of acting up to the Dignity of our Nature, by that innate Capacity or Understanding which is proper or peculiar to us as Men.

There is no doubt but a reasonable Foundation for Pride might be discovered, if we were to have Respect only to the Concerns and Interests of this Life; for some Men do exceedingly surpass others in those Advantages which are reckoned of highest Value among the Goods of this World; Whether we consider the Ornaments of Birth or Fortune, or the Accomplishments which are acquired by Discipline and Instruction in the Sciences and Arts of Civil Life; in these Respects there is very great Variety in the Conditions of Men; and therefore when we look upon one another only as Men of this World, it is easy to discern the Cause and the Foundation of our Pride.

But the Apostle has taught us, that such Persons who make Account of their own Worth or Perfections, by Comparison with what they observe in others, do not judge rightly of their own Excellency; *But they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves amongst themselves are not wise.* So far they are certainly wise enough to discern, how much they exceed many of their Brethren in Honour or Power, or Wealth, or other temporal Advantages, but while their Ambition carries them to place their Excellence and Contentment in such Acquisitions, they *are not wise*; that is, they have not that Wisdom, by which alone we can be conducted to our true Interest and Happiness.

By marking this Distinction between the Wisdom of this World, and the Wisdom which is from Heaven, it becomes very plain to our Observation, what sort of Excellency we may be capable of attaining unto, by means of those innate or natural Abilities, with which we perceive ourselves to be endowed; for by these it is certain, according to our Diligence and Industry, and the successful Application of temporal Advantages, we may be raised very much above the Level of other Men, and thereby attract their Admiration of our Condition, as greatly superior to their own in this World; But in this World, all these Advantages must have an End, and therefore the Wisdom of it, can be of very little Value, being of Service to us only for a very short Time, while we continue to labour through the Toils and Troubles and Perplexities of this Life.

It need not be questioned as a Matter of any Doubt, whether Men, who do very remarkably excel others in their Sagacity and Prudence, and worldly Foresight, are not often to be found in the Number of those Persons, who have no Regard at all to what God has said unto Man; for so much our Saviour has told us as clearly proves the Truth of this Observation, that *The Children of this World are in their Generation wiser than the Children of Light*; And therefore it is no Wonder, that the wise Men of it, should endeavour to persuade themselves, and others to believe, that by their Superiority in worldly Wisdom, they are possessed also of some peculiar Excellency or Dignity of Nature which they still retain, while they stand out in Disobedi-
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ence to the Will of God; but as this sort of political Wisdom is of no Account in the Sight of God, the Excellency or Dignity of our Nature is not at all attained by it: therefore he has called upon us by his Holy Spirit, directing us to be wise according to his Word; *And unto Man he said*, which is equivalent to the Expression (it is written) as it may be found in the Psalms, or in the Proverbs; *The Fear of the Lord that is Wisdom, and to depart from Evil is Understanding.*

God has spoken unto Man, and

2. The Design of his Instruction is to make us wise by fearing him, to depart from Evil.

If we examine into the Motives of all those Actions for which we are to be deemed accountable, or reasonable Creatures, we shall find that they may be properly referred to one or other of these Principles, either as proceeding from the Fear of God, or the Fear of Man: But by the Expression of fearing God, or fearing Man, we must understand a great deal more than what is usually understood by Fear; for in the Sense it is used in the Text and other places of Scripture, it signifies not only the Dread of God's Displeasure to be manifested in the Punishment of our Sins; but it is to be taken as a very comprehensive Term, denoting that Reverence and Respect which is due to the Name of God; to his Worship, to his House, to his Ministers, and most especially to that Declaration of his Will, which he has given us in his Holy Word, contained in those inspired Writings of the Prophets and Apostles, which are received by us

under the Title of the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament. The Fear of God does yet farther signify such awful Regard of his Power and Wisdom, and continual Presence with us, as being joined with Love in Acknowledgment of his Mercies and undeserved Blessings to us, does dispose our Minds, with Joy and Gratitude chearfully to receive and obey his Commands. So that under this View and Consideration of the Fear of God, which is agreeable to its Meaning, as we find it in his Word, it is properly to be accounted the leading Motive or Principle in every Action of a Christian Life.

By the same Method of explaining what is meant by *the Fear of Man* (which *Solomon* saith) *bringeth a Snare*; it will be found also to be the principal Motive in accounting for all the Actions of wicked Men; who are dishonest, or covetous, for Fear of being refused what they may want from the Hands of Men, who are proud and haughty in their Behaviour towards others, to keep them at a Distance, for Fear of receiving Injuries or Insults from them; who are ambitious in thirsting after worldly Power and Command, for Fear lest other Men should rise above them to keep down their Pride: And even with respect to the Indulgence of the private Vices and Passions of a sinful Life, the Sinner may very properly be said to fear himself; for he is afraid of encountering with that Reluctance or Uneasiness he must meet with, in resisting his evil Habits, before he can betake himself to a virtuous Course of Life; and, therefore,

therefore, out of Fear of the Pains he must undergo in reforming his Manners, against his own corrupt Inclinations, he makes the perverse Choice of being obstinate in his Course of living without the Fear of God.

Upon due Consideration of the Fruits of this Wisdom, which is derived from the Fear of Man, we must be brought to confess, it is of very little Value, even when it is most successful in answering all the Purposes for which it is employed; for how much soever we may excel in our Address and Abilities in conducting and engaging the Passions of other Men, to gratify our own, their Services can extend no farther than to give us some small Matters of Comfort, which may possibly vanish, long before the short Day of our Life is at an End, and thereby leave us more unhappy and discontented, than if we had never enjoyed their Favours; But if so be that our worldly Wisdom is of that Perfection and Extent, as to carry on and secure to us the Enjoyment of whatever we most fancy and delight in while we live, yet, in this Case also, the Fear of Man bringeth a Snare in our Prosperity, to fix our Hearts and our Attention wholly to the mean Interests and Concerns of this Life. The Fear of God is the only sure Remedy to supply this great Defect in all worldly Wisdom, which is, therefore, accounted Foolishness with God, because it takes into Consideration a very short Part of our Existence, and makes Provision only for a few evil Days, while it overlooks and neglects the great Interest of a glorious and blessed Eternity. It is, in this Respect, to engage our
Attention,

Attention, and encourage our Endeavours for attaining to our Happiness, that our merciful God hath called upon us; and *unto Man be said, the Fear of the Lord that is Wisdom, and to depart from Evil is Understanding.*

When the Fear of God is become the Principle or leading Motive of our Actions, the Consequence of it will certainly be, to depart from Evil; that is, from the Evil of Sin, whereby we provoke God. In this Sense also, *to depart from Evil is Understanding*; because it is a certain Proof that we understand our true Interest and Happiness, and how much the Value of our Inheritance in Heaven does exceed all the despicable Profits or Pleasures of this present Life: And, therefore, when Men neglect their everlasting Happiness, or pursue the Enjoyment of sensual Pleasures, in Preference to it, they are said to be without Understanding, and to be Fools without Knowledge: So *Solomon* tells us, *a Fool hath no Delight in Understanding*; he does not care to look so far before him, as to make that Purpose of Life the Subject of Consideration, which is of the greatest Consequence to him. And, for the like Reason, when God reproached the Nation of *Israel* for their Idolatry and Rebellion, he said of them, by *Moses*, *they are a Nation void of Counsel; neither is there any Understanding in them*: And, through his great Mercy and Compassion, He adds, *O that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter End!*

This is the great Test or Trial of our Understandings, in the due Application of them to consider

sider our latter End ; and the Word is misapplied and abused to a false Signification, when he is said to be a Man of Understanding, who is subtile in his Designs, confined to the mean Acts and Purposes of this Life. Such a Man may have good Sense, as that Phrase is used to signify a Capacity and Readiness to accommodate himself to the Passions of other Men ; to smoothe his Course through the Intricacies of this World ; and he may have the cunning Address, and Sagacity of the Serpent, to discern the Ways of other Men, and to attempt them in their Paths for his own Purposes ; but he is *void of Understanding* who departs from Truth, not considering his latter End.

From those Considerations which have been offered to engage us, to learn that Wisdom by which we may attain to the true Dignity and Excellence of our Nature, it does concern us to observe, what Hinderances may be cast in our Way to mislead or divert our Attention from it, and thereby betray us into false Rules or Measures of Life : And, from what has been said, we may collect, that our Danger does chiefly arise, either,

1. From the Temptations of the World, which may engage us to think highly of ourselves, according to the Measures we take of our own Worth or Excellency in it : Or,

2. We may be tempted to place the Excellency of our Nature, in some of those Attainments or Accomplishments of human Learning, which are apt to excite our Admiration of the Characters or Behaviour of Men towards one another, in social Intercourse, discharging the Offices of civil Life.

1. It

1. It is generally supposed that Men have some certain Principle of Action, which their Manner of reasoning does approve, before they come to order their Lives or Conversation by it: But on due Examination it will appear, that most Men are very unsteady, as to any one fixed Principle of Life; but, for want of Resolution, are carried away at Adventures, by the evil Custom or Course of this World; for, being held in Admiration of the Honours or Power, or Profits or Pleasures of it, they follow those Passions of their corrupted Nature, which are suitable at the present Time, to their Age and Temper, and constitutional Habits, and other Circumstances of their outward Condition; and therefore when some unsettled Notions of Religion are taken into Consideration, as having also some Sort of Influence to order their Lives; under this complicated View, it becomes difficult to give any other Description of them, but what we have from St. James: *He that wavereth is like a Wave of the Sea, driven with the Wind of Passion towards those Objects which tempt his Fancy and Imagination for the present Time, and tossed back after the Possession or Enjoyment of them, unsatisfied, to be driven again, by some other Gust of Passion that may next arise; for let not that Man think he shall receive any Thing of the Lord, while he continues in that wavering Temper of Mind; sometimes in a good Disposition towards his Duty, and afterwards looking back to the sinful Pursuits of his own corrupt Affections, and taking Part with them, he forfeits the Divine Assistance to guide and make him steadfast to any good Purpose of*
Life.

Life; whence *a double-minded Man is unstable in all his Ways.*

This Account will take in the Lives of a very great Part of Mankind, most of them contending eagerly for Wealth, others for Power, or Honour, or some other Interests, which occasionally determine their Pursuits, in the Variety of their Intercourse with one another; while the Motives of Religion are held at a Distance, and kept from interfering with their Business, which by Custom is allowed, and acknowledged, to have the first Place of Consideration, in the Minds of busy Men for this World.

But in the same Class of unstable Men, we may very properly consider all those Persons, who set out avowedly upon the Design of enjoying all the Pleasures of their Senses, and the various Amusements of their Fancy, which their Age, or their Taste, or their Wealth, or their Rank in Life may bring to their View, and recommend to their Pursuit.

It is certainly of no real service to Truth, or true Religion, to take pains in exaggerating the Follies and Vices of our Brethren; the Task is invidious, and destroys that Effect which it pretends to aim at, in the Reformation of Mankind, who are quicksighted enough to discover what Allowances are to be made, and to use them accordingly, when a vicious Character is drawn very far beyond the Life: But it might be hard to describe in such Terms as were suitable to the Subject, how far some Persons who have been educated

educated in Principles of true Religion, have corrupted and debased themselves ; who by having the outward Advantages of Birth and Fortune, and also great Abilities of Mind, by a proper Application of them, would have proved great Ornaments in Society, and a Blessing to Multitudes in observing and following their Examples, through a sober and religious Course of Life : But the deplorable Effects which their Examples have produced, according to those evil Ways in which they were infamous, even distant Generations may have Cause to lament ; for the Young, and the Gay, and the unthinking Persons of the World, are easily caught in Admiration of such like Characters, whose dangerous and insinuating Impostures, are gilded over with Wit and Pleasantry, and high Conceits of Ease and Freedom, and Elegance, in the Enjoyment of all the Pleasures of Life ; and therefore such Persons do readily propagate their Wickedness, together with those vain Notions, which recommend a Freedom of Thinking, and of Acting, beyond all Restraints which are laid upon us by our Religion, and are sure to have Numbers disposed to assert the like Privilege, according to their Capacity of indulging their Vices, to become eminent for Infidelity, and ambitious to excel in a debauched and dissolute Course of Life.

From this Source of Admiration and undistinguishing Praise, too often given to Men who have engaging Qualities perverted to detestable Purposes, it has arisen, that some Sort of Friendships, or Societies have been formed under different

ent Titles, expressing the Spirit and Temper of Persons let loose from all sober Reflections and Restraints, to range at large, and commit any Act of Wickedness or Wantonness, which their Fancy inflamed with Lust or Drunkenness shall incite them to undertake : And many also who do not chuse to proceed to the same Excess of Riot, in being Devils by Profession without Disguise are yet bold enough to avow their Intentions of making their Pleasures and Amusements the sole Business they resolve to pursue, and are fain to boast themselves, and glory in it as some peculiar Excellency of their Taste, in dispersing their Time, and their Thoughts and Attention, to follow the vain Shews of Dress, and Play, and continual Diversions in idle Companies, to become utterly impertinent, and insignificant, as to any useful Action, or Purpose of Life.

It has been already observed, that this Sort of Ambition may be justly derived from preceding Examples of splendid Characters in Impiety and Irreligion, but there are not wanting some other Aids to propagate the Infection, and to spread it much farther than such living Examples are able to proceed ; And this will appear by considering,

2. That we may be tempted to place the Excellence or Dignity of our Nature in some Attainments or Accomplishments of human Learning, which are apt to excite our Admiration of the Characters of one another in social Intercourse, discharging the Offices of civil Life.

There are no Arguments that can be fairly deduced from our Religion, to preclude our Endeavours to excel in those Arts and Sciences of human
Invention,

Invention, which contribute to the present Ease, and Order, and Conveniencies of human Life; the great Apostle of the Gentiles, by his own Example and Instructions hath taught us, *To maintain good Works for necessary Uses*; during our Continuance in this mortal State; but how much soever we may excel in these good Works, we must remember, they are only good for the present Time, and if our Views in Life are chiefly confined to such Excellency, as may be derived from an eminent or distinguished Character, and Abilities in human Learning and Inventions, we have no Title to expect from thence any other Reward, than what belongs to such Persons, who love the Praise of Men more than the Praise of God.

But besides this ambitious Desire of false Admiration, which has been powerful to betray the Understandings of many Persons of great Abilities for conducting the temporal Interests of their Brethren, to become insensible to the Obligations of Religion, and to grow hardy against Truth; there is another Source of dangerous Opposition to the Cause of true Religion, which has been long since opened, tho' perhaps not yet so seriously examined and censured, as the Malignity of it's Issue has deserved: For from this Source of human Learning, misapplied to represent the Follies and Vices of Mankind under gaudy Colourings and Allurements, to inflame the Imagination with high Conceits of sensual Joys, arising from the Indulgence of the Passions attributed to fantastical and fictitious Characters, those enormous Productions of Wit, and Humour, and Ridicule, and Raillery have arisen,

arisen, which have taken such Hold on the Natural Depravity and Corruption of those Persons who are conversant among them, as to make them almost insensible to any better Rules of Life, than what they have learned from such sort of Instructions.

It is not necessary to the Purpose of censuring these Performances with the Severity they deserve, to labour in bringing forth the Motives which have encouraged their Authors, to poison the Minds of their Brethren, with their pestilent Discourses; it may be, that most of them have been encouraged to send them out purely as it is said to try their Fortune in the World, to gain some small Matter of Profit by them; and others to seek for Praise and Admiration of their Abilities, which for such sort of Work is equally contemptible: But whatsoever the Intentions have been of these numberless Writers, who have swarmed in Variety of Titles and Inventions, it is sure the Fruits of their Industry are very apparent, in the Dissolution of Manners, and false Taste recommended by their spurious Productions.

It is true there may be scarce any of the Number we now speak of, who have made Sport of Human Life, and of the Consequences of our Actions who are not confident enough in making Pretences of Regard to Virtue and Religion; and some of them are well known to have interspersed frequent Mention of the Sacred Name of God, and Religious Arguments and Discourses together with the most despicable Drollery and Obscenity; from whence we might conjecture, that Inventions in

this Kind of dangerous Imposture being exhausted to the Dregs were now expiring; and therefore we might pass over such an Instance of a wavering and unstable, if not a profligate Spirit, without any Notice; were it not that very many have been captivated into unguarded Praise and Commendation of that Wit, which does the utmost Disgrace to the human Understanding in having any Taste or Relish for it.

All these Productions in which the Vices of Men are only ridiculed, when they are unfashionably, or unsuccessfully conducted, may be considered as new Editions, for improving and amending the original Plan of indulging our sensual Appetites to the best Advantage, without any immediate Reference or Respect to the Laws of God: And as the corrupt Nature of Man is ever prone to enjoy that Liberty, the highest Encouragement will of course be given, to the Industry of Authors affording such like Entertainments.

To reprove such Authors, and their Offspring, we may take the Words of *Moses*, zealous in behalf of the People of God, when he warned them against the bewitching Enticements of their idolatrous Neighbours, he said, *Their Vine is of the Vine of Sodom, and of the fields of Gomorah, their Grapes are Grapes of Gall, their Clusters are bitter, their Wine is the Poison of Dragons, and the cruel Venom of Asps: their Wine, though it appears sparkling to the Eye, inviting and alluring to the Taste, yet being received into the Constitution, it begets Convulsions there, and bitter Pangs of Death.*

It

It has been long since discerned, to be a Lesson of such high Importance, to learn to know ourselves, that the Command requiring us to pursue this Study, was justly said to have descended from Heaven; but the Words of this Command, must be extended yet farther, to signify that the Instructions conveying this Knowledge, have come down from Heaven; from whence we are not only commanded, but enabled also to know ourselves: And for this Purpose, we must attend to the Language of those Persons concerning human Nature, who have been divinely assisted, to see into its present depraved and wretched State, who were also marked out by the Grace of God, to become Examples to the rest of their Brethren, in struggling and contending for the Victory over their sinful Lusts and Affections, and to stand out in Opposition to the Snares of the Devil, and the Course of this evil World. So that instead of listening to our own corrupt Hearts, or to the Suggestions of that spiritual Pride, with which the Enemy of our Souls does endeavour to inspire us, let us attend to what the Patriarchs, and Prophets, and Apostles have told us, from that Knowledge they had of themselves, after all the Labours they underwent, to correct and amend their Lives; and without being more particular in this Appeal, we may take the Words of *Job* as expressing for each of them, how little they reckoned upon any inherent Excellency or Dignity of their Nature, when they compared their Actions with the Law of God, for they all spake as *Job* did,

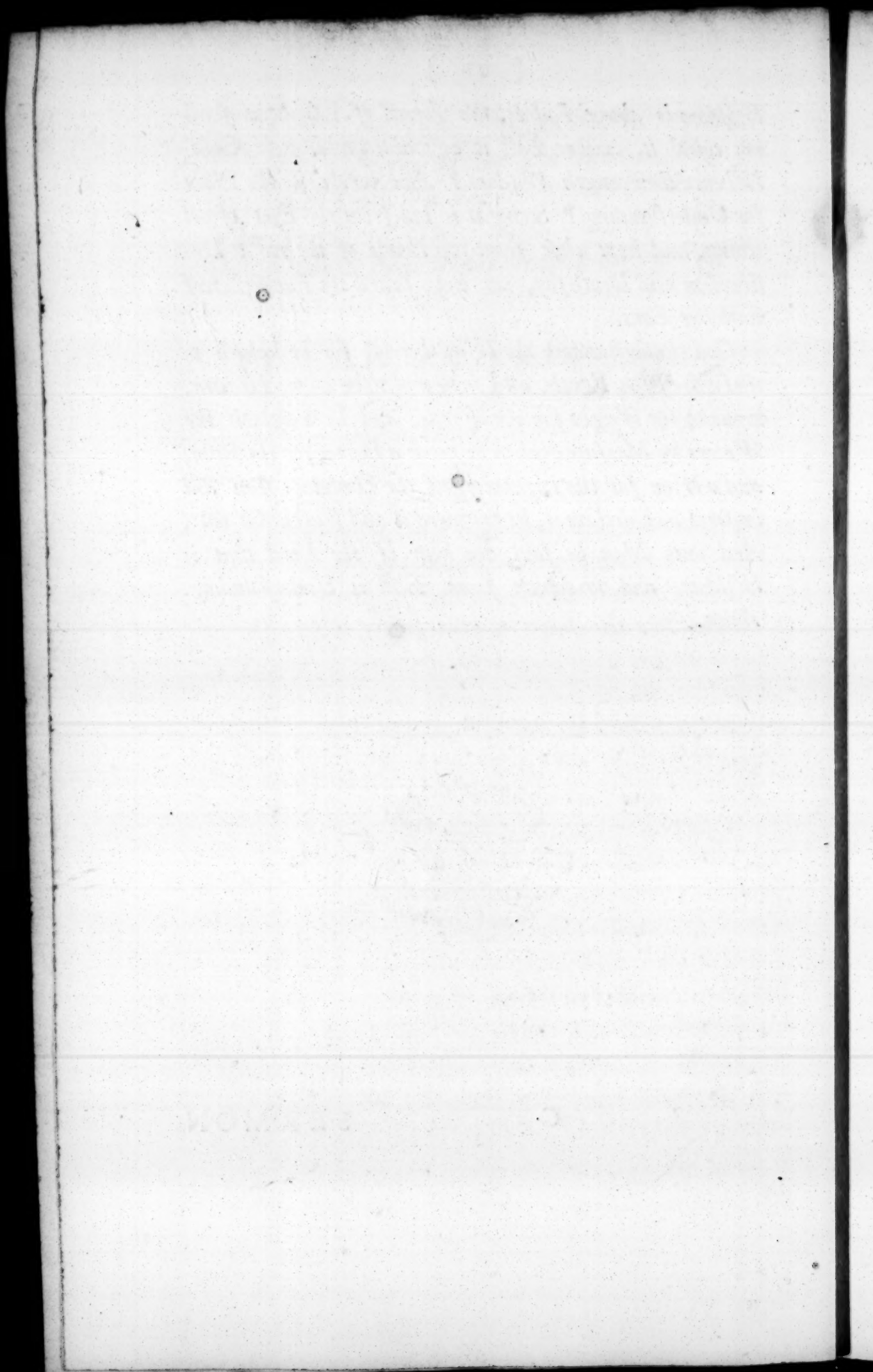
confessing his own Unworthiness, when he said,
I abhor myself and repent in Dust and Ashes.

To exalt us from this wretched State, in which we labour and are heavy laden, we must not betake ourselves to those Amusements for our Relief, which divert our Fancy in the Youth and Prosperity of our earthly Condition, being tempted thereby to forget ourselves, and to place the peculiar Excellence and Dignity of our Nature in such Attainments as come up with us, and are cut down like a Flower, nor must we trust to the deceitful Measures of worldly Wisdom, contending to over-reach, and over-top, and supplant one another in the Craftiness of it; but we must learn to *press toward the Mark, for the Prize of the high Calling of God in Christ Jesus*: to obtain that glorious Prize of Victory, which will insure to us for ever the highest Honour, and Excellence, and Dignity of our Nature improved and exalted to it's Perfection and Happiness, for which Purpose, the Path of heavenly Wisdom is laid open to us by the holy Spirit of God, and to excite our most earnest Endeavours under his Direction to pursue it, he has told us, *Man knoweth not the Price thereof, neither is it found in the Land of the Living; the Depth saith, it is not in me, and the Sea saith, it is not with me, it cannot be gotten for Gold, neither shall Silver be weighed for the Price thereof; it cannot be valued with the Gold of Ophir, with the precious Onyx, or the Sapphire, the Gold and the Chrystal cannot equal it, and the Exchange of it shall not be for Jewels of fine Gold; no mention shall be made of Coral or of Pearls, for the Price of Wisdom*

Wisdom is above Rubies, the Topaz of Ethiopia shall not equal it, neither shall it be valued with pure Gold. Whence then cometh Wisdom? And where is the Place for Understanding? Seeing it is hid from the Eyes of all living, and kept close from the Fowls of the Air; Destruction and Death say, we have heard the Fame thereof with our Ears.

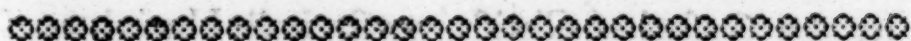
God understandeth the Way thereof, for he looketh to the Ends of the Earth, and seeth under the whole Heaven, to make the Weight for the Winds, and he weigheth the Waters by Measure; when he made a Decree for the Rain, and a Way for the Lightening of the Thunder; then did he see it and declare it, he prepared it and searched it out; And unto Man he said, the Fear of the Lord that is Wisdom, and to depart from Evil is Understanding. Amen.







S E R M O N II.



St. M A T T H E W v. 8.

*Blessed are the pure in Heart, for they shall see
God.*



THE general Belief and Persuasion that God has created and does govern the World, must unavoidably prevail on every Person who is capable of knowing his Dependance upon him, to desire that he should be received into his Favour and Protection; and this mighty Privilege of enjoying his Favour, is so well understood, that every Man by some Means or other, is fain to assert his Claim and Title to it. The Way to attain this Advantage, is pursued by those Acts which are designed for the Service or Worship of God. In Times past, when God suffered all Nations to walk in their own Ways,

although he left not himself without Witness to direct them to the true Object of their Worship, yet when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful to him for his Blessings, but became vain in their Imaginations, and their foolish Heart was darkened, by forsaking the true God, to worship Idols, and were therefore given up to Uncleanneſs, to lead impure and wicked Lives, ſuch as were ſhameful and diſhonourable to the Nature of Mankind : But ſince we have been bleſſed with the Revelation made by the Goſpel of Chriſt, we find all Unrighteouſneſs and Ungodlineſs of Men is there condemned, and from thence we may derive all neceſſary Rules for our Inſtruction, in the Ways and Worſhip of God. The true Object of our religious Worſhip, and the manner of performing it, are ſet forth to us in the cleareſt Manner by the immediate Authority of our Lord himſelf, who tells us that *God is a Spirit, and they that worſhip him, muſt worſhip him in Spirit and in Truth.*

Upon this Foundation, the divine Author of our Religion began his Preaching, by recommending ſpiritual Virtues to the Obſervance of his Followers, and teaching them to underſtand, that the Perfection and Acceptance of their Obedience with God, did depend, on exerciſing themſelves in thoſe Virtues : Upon this Condition, the great Privileges and Benefits of the Goſpel, are promiſed to them, and full Assurance is given of the Mercy and Favour of God.

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These Virtues are pointed out to us in that Discourse which our Saviour made to his Followers on the Mount, and the Multitudes which surrounded him on this Occasion, did represent the successive Generations of Mankind, who were to be enlightened by the sacred Doctrine he then delivered ; for which Purpose, his Preaching was in such Terms, as could easily be understood by them, and was enforced by those Considerations, that ought to have the greatest Influence to direct and govern their Wills.

To be happy or blessed, was the Desire of every Person who came to hear him, and this must continue to be the Desire of all Men, unto the End of the World ; and here we find Happiness promised and assured in the highest Degree, upon such Conditions as may be learned and practised by all Mankind.

Happiness, which includes the Favour of God, the Blessings of his Kingdom, the Comforts of his Holy Spirit, his Protection upon Earth, the Perfection of Holiness, the Mercies of his Grace, the Discovery of his Goodness, our Adoption as his Children, and our Inheritance prepared for us in Heaven ; all these mighty Privileges, are promised, to the poor in Spirit, to the Meek, and to them who hunger and thirst after Righteousness ; to the Merciful, to the pure in Heart, to the Peace-makers, and to them who are persecuted for Righteousness sake : So that whatsoever Difficulties Men may have to contend with, in acquiring these Virtues, there is no room left for

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us to doubt they are the necessary Means and Foundation of our Happiness.

Such Fulness of Wisdom dwelt in our heavenly Master, that he set forth in one View, what all the Wisdom of the World had never been able to determine, when he describes what sort of Persons they are who shall be happy, as being intitled to the favour of God, who can bestow all good Things they can wish to enjoy.

Among these Persons who are happy, or *blessed are the pure in Heart, for they shall see God.*

The Heart being the Source or Fountain of animal Life, does in the Language of holy Scripture frequently signify the Seat of the Passions, that Part of the inward Man, which gives Birth to those Inclinations which tempt us to *live after the Flesh*, to pursue and embrace the Pleasures of Sense; under this View our Saviour considered it when he said, *out of the Heart proceed evil Thoughts, Murders, Adulteries, Fornications, Thefts, false Witness, Blasphemies, these are the Things which defile a Man*; whatsoever wicked or sinful Practice we are guilty of, the Root of it is to be found in an unclean, or evil Heart.

The Heart is also spoken of in Scripture, as the Seat of those good Dispositions, which discover themselves in the Actions of a holy and virtuous Life: So our Saviour also tells us, that *a good Man out of the good Treasure of his Heart, bringeth forth that which is good.*

The same Observation is recommended to our Notice, by his Comparison of a good Man to a good Tree, which bringeth forth good Fruit, in like

like manner as a corrupt Tree bringeth forth evil Fruit, by which we are taught, that the Quality of our Heart whether pure or corrupt, will have a suitable Effect on our outward Behaviour, and that our inward Character may be discerned from thence, as a Tree is known by it's Fruits.

We must not therefore suppose, that our Sins may be imputed to accidental Circumstances, or Temptations that have fallen in our Way, or that our Situation in Life was such, as we could not avoid the particular Transgressions against the Laws of God, which we have been guilty of ; such Excuses are false, and the true Account is, *that every Man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed* ; the Temptations we meet with from without, gain their Admission by the corresponding Corruption of our Hearts ; or rather it is the Wickedness of our own Hearts that raiseth up Temptations to entice us from our Duty.

The same Truth we have confirmed to us by many other Declarations of holy Scripture, thus we find when God was provoked to destroy the Inhabitants of the World by a Flood, because he saw that *the Wickedness of Man was great in the Earth* ; this universal Corruption and Depravity of Man, is set forth in this Expression, *that every Imagination of the Thoughts of his Heart, was only Evil continually.*

The Prophet *Jeremiah* complains also, that *the Heart is deceitful above all Things, and desperately wicked, who can know it ?* And *Solomon* advises to keep the
Heart

Heart with all Diligence, for out of it are the Issues of Life.

All such Declarations in the Word of God, are designed to make it appear plain to us, that the Quality of the Heart, is what constitutes the real Difference between a good and a wicked Man, and of Course to direct us how our Care is to be employed, when we mean to reform our Lives.

This Observation must lead us to enquire, what it is that corrupts or renders the Heart impure.

If we search diligently into ourselves, we shall discover, that this Corruption is owing to the Love, Esteem and Admiration of the World, and of the Things that are in the World; from whence an earnest Desire does arise after the Profits or Pleasures or Honours of this Life, and of Course we shall find every wicked Man pursuing some one or other, or all of those Allurements.

There is a Time in which we cannot conceive otherwise of such things as gratify our Senses, than that they are absolutely good, and desireable and every way fit to make us easy and happy; our Minds are then wholly employed about them, as being incapable of considering any distant or remote Consequences of our Actions; such was our Condition in Child-hood, that we could look no farther for our Happiness than to what satisfied our Appetites, and did find no Uneasiness in giving ourselves up to be led by them, and it was at this Time that our Love and Admiration of
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outward sensible Objects laid hold upon our Hearts.

There is also another Time of Life, in which the Mind begins to reflect upon our Actions, with regard to some more perfect Rule, than what our natural Appetites lead us to observe; and that Rule, which necessarily requires our first and principal Attention, is such as we are informed, or do believe, to be agreeable to the Will of God: If on comparing our Actions with this Rule we find they agree with it, we enjoy a quiet State of Mind, we approve what we have done, and are full of good Hopes concerning our present and future Happiness; if on the contrary, we are conscious that to gratify our Passions, we have forsaken what we believe to be the Will of God, and in Opposition to it have lived as our Lusts, and unreasonable Desires have led us, we necessarily become subject to Disorder in our Minds, they grow uneasy and painful, and with the Knowledge of our Guilt, dismal Fears and Forebodings of future Misery do arise, which can only be removed by some Hope or Assurance that we shall be restored again to the Favour of God.

This Uneasiness which we feel in acting contrary to what our Mind or Reason approves as conformable to the Will of God, is a continual Check or Restraint to call us off from the Pursuit of sinful Designs, such as our Passions propose to our Choice; and this effect it would always have, if it were not for that Love and Regard for sensual Gratifications that has taken Root and grown up in our Hearts; from whence it becomes usual to ballance the

the present Satisfaction afforded by Indulgence of Appetite, against the clear Determinations of Reason to the contrary, and accordingly as St. Paul has described this State, *then we see another Law in our Members warring against the Law of our Mind, and bringing us into Captivity to the Law of Sin which is in our Members*, in this wretched Condition every Man must continue whose Heart is possessed with that Love or Admiration of outward worldly Advantages or Pleasures, which carries him to believe they are necessary to his Happiness, tho' they must be acquired by neglecting or disobeying the Law of his Mind.

This dangerous Error will account for all the particular Transgressions of our Duty, and instead of imputing our Sins to accidental Causes, or Circumstances of Temptation, they should be derived from this fixed and settled Cause in our own Breasts, which is the Corruption of our Hearts arising from this Love, and undue Regard for outward earthly Things.

To this Fountain of our Iniquity we are referred, both by the Word of God and our own Experience, and to cleanse and keep it pure, should be the constant Purpose and Endeavour of our Lives : How this may be done deserves now to be considered.

The Vanity and Disappointments we meet with in all worldly Enjoyments, may very reasonably be urged to abate and cool our Passions in the Pursuit of them : Our own Experience, so far as it can extend, agrees to confirm what we are assured of by the wisest Men ; — That if we give ourselves up to enjoy Pleasure, to walk in the Ways of our
Hearts,

Hearts, and in the Sight of our Eyes, we shall be sure, after all, to find *Vanity and Vexation of Spirit* : Our Confession, upon looking back, will certainly be, that sensual Delights did not answer our Expectations; they were found to be vain and empty; and our Spirit, or Mind, will be disquieted, and cannot be satisfied with such Entertainments.

But this Argument, taken from Experience of the Emptiness of all worldly Enjoyments, being urged to hinder us from the unlawful Pursuit of them, is defective, and will not answer the Purpose for which it is alledged; because it does not absolutely conclude, that what we seek for is not to be found in them; but only, that hitherto we have not met with it. This Defect leaves a Way open to our Passions to solicit us continually for new Trials; and every Temptation comes recommended by some peculiar Circumstance to procure a Compliance: Therefore some other Means are necessary, to disengage and to dispossess our Hearts from the corrupt Desire and Love of the Pleasures of Sense; and these must be derived from the Word of God.

St. *Peter*, arguing in Behalf of the *Gentile* Converts to Christianity, that they should be excused from observing the Law of *Moses*, speaks for them to this Purpose; that God, who knoweth the Hearts, bare them Witness of his Acceptance, by giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto the believing *Jews*, and put no Difference between them and the *Gentiles*; *purifying their Hearts by Faith*. Here we find Faith is pointed out, as the Means

Meatis or Instrument made use of for purifying the Heart.

The Apôſtle, in his Epistle to the *Hebrews*, has told us, that *Faith is the Substance of Things hoped for ; the Evidence of Things not seen*: And mentions, as the First Effect of it upon our Minds, *that through Faith we understand, that the Worlds were framed by the Word of God ; so that Things which are seen, were not made of Things which do appear*: Or, as it is expressed in the Words of *Moses*, through Faith we understand that *in the Beginning, God created the Heavens and the Earth*.

There is not any Truth more readily embraced, when proposed to the human Mind, than that this World, containing all Things which are the Objects of our Senses, was created by God, the All-wise, Eternal, and Almighty Being: And if this Truth were carried along with us, in all our Reasonings and Deliberations concerning these Things, it would prevent our Mistakes in the Use and Application of them ; for if we sincerely believe that God made all Things which our Senses discover to us, we must acknowledge they can have no Power in or of themselves: As they subsist merely by the Will of God, whatever Properties they have, to contribute to the Ease or Pleasure, or Support of our Bodies ; that is, all the Goodness we can find in them, must also be acknowledged as an Effect of the Will and Appointment of their Creator. But when we use or enjoy these Things, contrary to our Duty, or to that Knowledge we have of the Will of God, we suppose, in Fact, that they have some Good in themselves, which
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we may enjoy independently, or in Opposition to the Will of God:

In this false Supposition, most injurious to the Honour of God, the Guilt of the first Transgression of Man did consist; and when we taste of any sinful Pleasure, it is of the Fruit of the same corrupt Tree: All the subsequent Acts of Sin are taken off the Branches sprung from that original Root of Corruption.

While this strong Delusion possesses the Heart, that what is good for us among the Creatures, may be found and enjoyed, without having Regard to the Will of God; it will certainly follow, that wicked Men will love the Creature, and forsake God; whereas, if we do believe as we ought to do, that all these earthly good Things, which serve for our Use, are given by him as Expressions of his Goodness to us, we shall remove our Love from them to him, and we shall ascribe all Power to God, to whom it belongs, which is the first and most proper Act of Faith; and so our Faith will dispossess our Hearts of the sinful and corrupt Love and Admiration of the World, and of the Things that are in it; that is, it will cleanse and purify our Hearts.

What Reward we may expect from this Virtue of Purity, comes next to be considered. *The pure in Heart are blessed, for they shall see God.*

It appears, from what has been said, that such Persons are free from all those evil Passions, which, proceeding from the Heart, do occasion Murders, Adulteries, Fornications, Envyings, and such like Disorders, as make the Lives of Men wretched

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and miserable. By purifying their Hearts, they come to have a Temper and Disposition leading them to Happiness; and are, therefore, approved and accepted into the Favour of God: They are said, in Scripture, *to walk with God, to be sensible of his Presence, as of a Friend they are daily conversing with*: His Goodness does appear to them in all the various Ways and Works of his Providence; and in every Circumstance of Life they can discern his kind and merciful Hand.

The Men of impure and corrupt Hearts, blinded by their Love of deceitful Pleasures, are not able to discern the Ways and the Works of God. The wicked Man, or, as the Psalmist calls him, the Fool, although he may confess the Truth with his Mouth, yet, in his Heart, from whence the Motives of his Actions do proceed, he has said *there is no God*: He does not see, and will not acknowledge his Hand in the Government of the World: He proposes to derive his Success in it from his own Counsels, which lead him into those Ways and Works of Darkness and of Error, that deprave his Judgment and Understanding; so that God is not to be found in all his Thoughts; and, therefore, as God is loving and merciful unto such as are pure in Heart; and manifests himself unto them, for he *knoweth the Way of the Righteous*: So, likewise, it does follow, that the Workers of Iniquity *walk in the Vanity of their Mind; having the Understanding darkened, being alienated from the Life of God, through the Ignorance that is in them, because of the Blindness of their Heart*; on which Account, *the Way of the Ungodly shall perish*.

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But the glorious Privilege of the pure in Heart, that *they shall see God*, must principally refer to that Time, when the final Difference will be made, between the Righteous and the Wicked; of which Time, St. *John* saith, *it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is, and every Man who hath this Hope in him, purifieth himself even as he is pure.*

In what this Likeness to God shall consist, we cannot learn more particularly than from St. *Paul*, speaking of the Resurrection of the Dead; *the first Man is of the Earth, earthy; the second Man is the Lord from Heaven: As is the earthy, such are they also who are earthy; and as is the heavenly, such are they also who are heavenly; and as we have borne the Image of the earthy, we shall also bear the Image of the heavenly.* And this Image or Likeness, St. *John* informs us, shall be derived to us upon the Vision or Sight of God: *we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is:* That is, our Bodies shall then be made like to the Spiritual Body of *Christ*; for we shall see him as he is, in his glorified State.

Here all our Enquiries must end, concerning the Blessedness of the Pure in Heart. What Glory, and Joys and Happiness, they shall partake of, doth not yet appear in this present State, in which *we see through a Glass darkly.* But how great soever our Faith may represent them to us, we are sure they will exceed all we are now able to conceive.

Having shewn what Persons are to be accounted the pure in Heart; that they are such as by Faith

have dispossessed their Hearts of the corrupt Love and Admiration of this World, and the Things that are in it; and are, therefore, governed by the Love of God, which lays a sure Foundation both for their present and future Happiness. It now remains, to make some useful Application of what has been said.

I. As our Saviour *Christ* hath revealed to us the Terms for obtaining the Favour of God, and of finding Acceptance with him, to make us for ever happy or blessed, we must beware of trusting to any other Conditions for this End, than to such as are declared and enjoined by his Gospel.

The deceitful Heart of Man is not more ready to suggest Motives to entice us from our Duty, and betray us into the Disease and Misery of a sinful State, than it is solicitous to find out some Remedies that may give Relief to our Minds, with a Prospect of recovering the Favour of God.

But while the Love of the World, or of sensual Pleasures is rooted in the Heart, before it is purified by Faith, these Remedies must be always consistent with that Principle from whence our Iniquity has proceeded; and so of course it follows, that we shall only disallow the outward Act of Transgression, still retaining that secret Cause, from whence our Disobedience to the Will of God has proceeded; thus much was signified by Sacrifices in the Heathen World, and the Use of them was designed, as a Confession to the Justice of that Sentence, which passed on the first Offenders against the Law of God.

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The same Intention of disavowing the outward Act of Sin, has given rise to those Corruptions of the Purity of the Gospel, by which Men have been taught to place their Hopes of Admission to the Divine Favour upon those Performances, which are nothing more than bodily Exercise ; or at most, go no farther than such Mortifications, as have no Efficacy in cleansing the inward Fountain of their Wickedness.

The same Error, of attending only to the outward Act of Sin, and condemning it in Practice, will proceed yet farther, and corrupt the Purity of the Gospel Morality ; teaching Men to believe themselves capable of meriting the Divine Acceptance, and of acting up (as it is said) to the Dignity of their Nature, by the Performance of such moral or social Duties, as they conclude to be most serviceable to the Interest and Happiness of Mankind.

That Men are designed for Society, and obliged to promote the Welfare of each other, is always supposed and required by the Gospel ; and such Offices as contribute to the mutual Ease and Comfort of our Lives in this World, are recommended in it as good Works, which are useful and beneficial unto Men : But we must not from hence imagine, that our Endeavours in this Way are absolutely necessary to carry on the Purposes of Divine Providence, in distributing his Blessings to Mankind ; and that the Happiness of our Neighbour should depend upon our Help and Assistance ; the Gospel will teach us to acknowledge, that God can bring all his Counsels to pass, without our Concur-

rence, and that his Goodness towards any of his Creatures cannot be limited, by our want of Goodwill to conspire with it; therefore to make our Service in doing Good acceptable to him, it must come recommended by our Faith, which brings us to observe, what *St. Paul* enforces by his Command to *Titus*, *This is a faithful Saying, and these Things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God, might be careful to maintain good Works.* Our Faith, if it is sincere, must shew itself by our being careful to do good Works, which are profitable unto Men; and the same Disposition of Mind which prepares us to be happy, will engage us to contribute what we can to the Happiness of others: But without this inward Perfection of Holiness and Purity which gives Birth to the unfeigned Love of God and of Man; whatever Good we have done for Mankind, their Praise will be all our Reward; whatever moral or social Virtues we have learned to exercise, we shall deserve only the Favour or good Word of Men; If we give all our Goods to the Poor; if we have universal good Will or Benevolence, even this profiteth nothing as to our real Happiness, unless it be one and the same with that Virtue of Charity, whose Praise is not of Men, who cannot discern the inward Purposes of Action: but of God who seeth the secret Workings of the Mind.

2. As it has been observed, that our Hearts are purified by Faith, we must apply ourselves to those Means which are necessary to inform our Understandings with this Principle of Life.

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All the Wisdom of Man considered as distinct from Divine Revelation, cannot give Birth to this Principle ; because all human Knowledge must arise by Conclusions from our Experience in conversing with Objects of Sense ; and our Knowledge must be so much the more perfect in Proportion to our Experience, or the Number of Trials we have made in discovering the Properties of those Objects we converse with ; but as these Trials may be endless, our Knowledge of course can never be perfect ; and as we have already observed, after all the Disappointments we have met with, we may still suppose our Happiness is to be found, among the Objects of Sense, altho' we have not yet met with it: But our Faith presents us with the Conclusion in one View, which all our own Searches can never bring us to acknowledge: It gains that Conviction of Mind, in ascribing all Power unto God, which supersedes all Experiments, and destroys that Supposition of Goodness or Excellence in the Creatures independent of the Will of God, which is the Root and Foundation of all our Disappointments ; and therefore this Principle which sets aside all our Wisdom and Experience, as insufficient for conducting us to Happiness, is not to be derived from our own Understandings : But as those Things which defile a Man come from within, out of the Heart, that which purifies the Heart must come from without, that is, it must descend from above ; and this Observation agrees with *St. Paul*, who tells us, *That Faith cometh by Hearing* ; it is not of the Growth of our own Minds arguing about the Relations of Things ; it is not

from any internal Light of Nature or moral Sense ; but it is by hearing somewhat to inform our Understandings, not of the Arguments or Reasonings of Philosophers, but this *Hearing cometh by the Word of God* : Therefore as we regard our present and future Happiness, we must give awful and diligent Attention, to the reading and hearing of the Holy Scriptures, as necessary to beget Faith in us, that Principle of Life, which will cleanse and purify the Heart.

3. It appears from what has been said, that when our Hearts are purified by Faith, we come to understand the true Value of all these temporal Things, to the Use of which we are confined in this mortal State ; we are not debarred from enjoying what is good for us among them, while we comply with the Rules of our Duty ; but the perfect Discovery of the Will of God, which we are blessed with in the Gospel, teacheth us to make a Separation between the Good and the Evil ; to convince us of that Misery and Disappointment we must meet with, if we place our Hopes of Happiness among the perishing Comforts of this World.

To conclude. If we are content to labour for that Meat which perisheth, and are willing to undergo many Hardships, to be a little better fed or cloathed, or raised some small Degree higher than the ordinary Race of Men, have we no Ambition to look forward to that Time, and to consider what Appearance we shall make in that general Assembly which shall stand before the Judgment-seat of God ? When the great and final, and eternal Distinction shall be made, between the Righteous

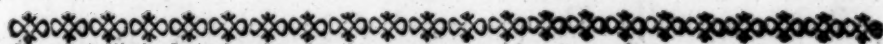
teous and the Wicked. Have we no Concern about our Condition in that Day, when everlasting Rewards shall be distributed to those who have overcome? Has it no Power to engage our Affections, and encourage our Endeavours, when we consider, that these light Afflictions we submit to, in striving for the Mastery, to subdue our corrupt and criminal Desires, will then be recompensed with endless Peace? That our Names shall be written in the Book of Life; that we shall be acknowledged by our Saviour *Christ*, as his Servants, before his Father and the holy Angels; that we shall be admitted into the Company and Fellowship of the Saints of God, and Spirits of just Men made perfect; to be clothed in white Raiment, with everlasting Joy upon our Heads; to be *crowned with Glory and Honour*, in being blessed as the pure in Heart, for *they shall see God*.



SERMON

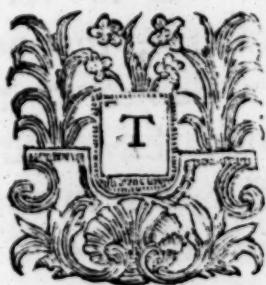


SERMON III.



MATTHEW xviii. 7.

Wo unto the World because of Offences, for it must needs be that Offences come, but Wo to that Man by whom the Offence cometh.



THESE Words of our blessed Saviour were introduced upon Occasion of a Question which had arisen among his Disciples, who, in Consequence of what he had informed them concerning his Kingdom, had disputed among themselves, *who is greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?*

The First
Sermon on
this Subject.

They had not yet so thoroughly apprehended the Design of that Kingdom which our Lord came to establish upon Earth, as to consider it in any

any other Way superior to the Kingdoms of this World, but with respect to the Greatness of its Power and Extent, over-ruling and bearing down all Opposition that could be made against it; and then looking upon themselves as the chief Instruments and Favourites of their Master in accomplishing his Designs for subduing the World, it came in their Way to reason upon this Matter, who among them should be greatest in this Kingdom of Heaven?

In Answer to this Question, and to reprehend their false Conceits arising from the Hopes of obtaining worldly Power and Advantages by being admitted into his Kingdom; *Jesus called a little Child unto him, and set him in the Midst of them, and said unto them, except ye be converted and become as little Children, ye shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.*

This Reproof was designed to shew them, that they had gone very far astray in their Reasonings concerning his Kingdom, which was so very much unlike the Kingdoms of the Earth, that no Person would be acknowledged as a Subject of it, who had any of those Qualities, which have usually recommended Servants and Subjects to the Notice and Favour of the Princes of this World; for the Servants of Christ must not be proud, or ambitious or revengeful, not crafty and designing in their Schemes for the Riches or Honours of this World, not watchful to circumvent and over-reach one another in their Designs to be the greatest; but the Endowments of their Minds must be of another Sort; for it is of their Character, to be

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contented with their Condition, easy and resigned to their present Circumstances, meek and humble and patient, with Simplicity and Openness, and Freedom of Manners, like little Children without Dissimulation and without Hypocrisy : Therefore the Disciples of our Lord by contending who should be greatest among them, to bear Rule over the rest, did then quite mistake the Nature of his Kingdom ; for which Reason he told them, they must be converted, or go back again from being Men of this World, to learn the Dispositions of a little Child ; without such Qualification, they would be so far from being great in his Kingdom, they should not at all enter into it.

But to lay the greatest Stress upon the Acquisition of that Virtue of Humility, which was most opposite to the Dispute that had been among them, he proceeds in recommending it more especially to their Notice, when he said, *whosoever shall humble himself as this little Child, the same is greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven* ; where the Expression is remarkable in setting forth the Excellency of an humble Spirit in the Disciple of Christ ; not that he who has it shall be the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven, but he is already admitted and possessed of the highest Privileges of this Kingdom while it continues upon Earth.

To shew how much such Persons are esteemed in the Sight of God, our Lord declares yet farther in their Favour, that whatever Benefit is done for them in advancing their Spiritual Welfare, he will acknowledge it as done for himself, for so much his Words import, *whoso shall receive one such lit-*
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*the Child in my Name receiveth me ; as on the contrary, that whosoever shall pervert or lead astray from the Truth, and Faith in his Name, one of these humble and meek and undesigning Persons of the World, who are converted to be his Disciples, it were better for him who gives this Offence, that he were irrecoverably lost as to this World, for so it is expressed that *whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a Millstone were hanged about his Neck, and that he were drowned in depth of the Sea:* To this our Lord immediately subjoined the Words of the Text, *Wo unto the World because of Offences, for it must needs be that Offences come, but Wo to that Man by whom the Offence cometh.**

It appears from the Connection of the Text, with what our Saviour had said before, which we have now observed, and by comparing also the various Passages of Scripture, that have Relation to what is expressed in these remarkable Words, that by Offences are meant whatsoever Words, Discourses, or Actions, we may be guilty of, with a View or Tendency to pervert or seduce the Mind of any of our Brethren, from due Reverence, Regard or Attention, to the Word of divine Truth.

By considering the Text in this Light, it will follow, that we should observe from it.

1. That some very great Evils of general Influence and Extent, were to come upon the World, from Offences, or Scandals arising in it ; which is clearly signified by our Lord's Declaration of *Wo unto the World because of Offences.*

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2. That such Offences will certainly come, according to the Order of divine Counsel, for the Salvation of the World, *it must needs be that Offences come.*

3. That he who gives Offence to deceive, or betray his Brethren into Error, and thereby begets in them a Contempt or Disregard of the Truth, is liable in a high Degree, to the Wrath and Judgment of God. *Wo unto that Man by whom the Offence cometh.*

1. That some very great Evils of general Influence and Extent, were to come upon the World, from Offences or Scandals arising in it.

There can be no Doubt, but that the Wo threatened and denounced upon the World because of Offences, did arise from hence, that our Lord foresaw the Minds of Men would be depraved and seduced from the Belief of divine Truth, that is from believing in his Name, unto a Belief in Lies, or of such Doctrines as would lead Men to reject the Authority of his Religion, and betake themselves to other Names, and to other Authorities, to guide and determine them in the Course of their Lives. We are led to understand his Words to this Purpose, very clearly ; by the Connection already observed, for after expressing by a Sign of the Punishment how great his Guilt would be, who should offend one of these little Ones who believe in his Name, he proceeds immediately to foretel, how great the Misery of the World would be from Offences or Scandals arising in it. So that as the Injury here spoken of as done to offend one of these little Ones, is with respect

respect to their believing in his Name, we must conclude, that the evil Influence of those Offences which our Lord said would arise in the World, is of the same kind also, to occasion very great, or general Apostacies, Revolts, or Defections from the Faith, or Belief in the Name of Christ.

There is no Person so inconsiderable by his Station in Life, who may not by his Actions or Discourses, give Occasion to some of his Brethren, to conceive a Prejudice or ill Impression concerning their Duty, and is thereby capable of betraying or diverting their Minds from the Truth or Faith in Christ, so that any Sin we commit, which falls under the Observation of those we converse with, as it is a Proof to them of our Infidelity, it becomes an Argument also to solicit them to Infidelity by our evil Example. From whence it follows, that it would be endless to reckon up in how many Ways we may be guilty of offending our Brethren, because every sinful Act we do before Men, may in some Degree or other contribute, to mislead, or prejudice their Minds against the Truth.

By this Consideration it appears, how we may become Partakers in other Men's Sins, though at the Time they are committed, we have no direct Intercourse or Communication with them; for if any Thing we have said or done wickedly, hath contributed to unsettle the Mind of any of our Brethren, and to pervert it from due Attention and Regard to divine Truth, to receive evil Opinions, and to act accordingly, we are guilty
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of propagating Infidelity, and will be so accounted in the Sight of God, whose Eye can trace the secret Ways and Purposes of our Hearts.

So that when we come to make Confession of our Sins before God, and to forsake them by Repentance, it will concern us to take into the Account, the Transgressions we have been guilty of, by which we have offended our Brethren, as having either by our Words or Actions, contributed to diminish, or destroy the Authority of God's Word upon their Minds, and thereby leave them naked and exposed to the Snares of the Devil: And upon the same Account it will behove us also to be careful for the future, that our Behaviour may be blameless in the Sight of all Men; which is as the Apostle has exhorted, that we should *abstain from all Appearance of Evil*.

We have just now observed, that it would be endless to remark in how many Ways we may be capable of giving Offence to our Brethren, since every idle Word we speak, and every sinful Act we commit in the Presence of other Men, may have some evil Influence to betray one or other of them, into a Contempt or Disregard of the Word or Commandment of God.

But there are some sorts of idle Words, which do in a more especial Manner tend to give Offence to our Brethren; and these are the Words and Discourses of the Scorners or Scoffers at Religion; of whom the Apostle St. Peter has given Warning, that there shall come in the last Days, *Scoffers walking after their own Lusts*, who do not under-

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take to overturn the Faith of others by any serious Argument, but desire to shift off all sober Enquiries about it, attempting the Word of God, through the Force of Ridicule, by Scoffs and Jests, and prophane Mirth, to destroy its Authority, and Influence, and make it contemptible in the Eyes of Men.

There is no doubt but every one of us may have heard very many of such sort of idle Words and Discourses ; and to prepare ourselves against the bad Effect they might have upon us, it is fit we should take the Caution given by the Apostle to beware of these Scoffers, who are very dangerous Instruments in the Hand of the Enemy of our Souls, to betray us from Truth, into the Belief of his Lies ; and it may be, that of all the various Devices he has made use of, as there is none more easily learned, than the Art of scoffing or mocking at Religion, so it has been the most successful also in carrying on his Designs, especially among the young and the gay, the vain, and unthinking Part of Mankind ; for which Reason, no doubt, Ridicule has been recommended, as the Touchstone of Truth, and of true Religion, by a very eminent Master in the Science of propagating Infidelity ; for the surest Way to keep Men from Truth is to give them a Prejudice against it, such as will save them the Trouble of Enquiry, and may furnish them also with Wit, and keep them always in good Humour with themselves, and their Company, to follow freely their own Counsels and Contrivances.

If we have learned to take Pleasure in this sort of Wit, and have employed it upon Occasions among our Brethren, it does concern us very earnestly to repent of it, and to pray for their Recovery also who have been misled or perverted from due Reverence to the Word of God, by our impious, or idle or prophane Words or Discourses; since if one of these little Ones, even the meanest Person we converse with, should be offended by our Means, whosoever shall give that Offence, *it were better for him that a Milstone were hanged about his Neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the Sea.*

It is easy for us to see what Evils do arise by the general Course of our Conversation with one another in the World, where Wickedness is propagated by bad Example, and the good Manners of those who are innocent are depraved, by evil Communication, with others who are corrupted; and therefore on this Account our Lord saw much Cause to pronounce, *Wo unto the World because of Offences.*

But by his clear Discernment throughout all future Opposition, which would be made against the Word of his Truth, our Lord had yet much greater Reason to declare, *Wo unto the World, because of Offences:* That is, because of those general Offences which have arisen in it, by means of such Persons, who have employed their Learning and Abilities for Argument, to give Occasion for Offences, betraying great Numbers to depart from Truth, or to reject the Faith in Christ, to embrace superstitious, heretical or impious Doctrines: And

on Account of that Success, which the Enemy of Truth would meet with, by the Industry and Address of these Instruments, it is more especially to be understood as the Fruit arising from their Labours, that our blessed Lord has foretold, *Wo unto the World.*

We are informed by our Lord himself, what the great Design was, of his coming into the World, as we find it expressed in his own Words, *To this End was I born, and for this Cause came I into the World, that I should bear Witness unto the Truth:* Therefore the Enemy of Truth, and of our Salvation, will of course endeavour, by all Ways and Methods of Deceit, according to his Power and Policy, to evade and defeat this End of our Lord's coming into the World; for the Kingdom of our Lord being founded on the Truth, the Devil will employ his Art and Industry to divert our Attention, and to betray our Souls from resting upon that Foundation, by inducing us to believe in such Lies and Forgeries, as are most likely to find Admittance and Entertainment, according to our own Reasonings and Apprehensions of Things.

So that the God of this World, to support his Kingdom which is of this World, will endeavour by all Arguments which may be brought, to pervert our Understandings from the Knowledge of Divine and Heavenly Things, to fix our Attention upon earthly Things, and so to engage us in their Pursuit, that we may act and live according to his Principle, preferring the Indulgence of our Appetites in sensual Pleasures, to the Hope and Assurance

Assurance of everlasting Happiness, by Obedience to the Will of God.

As the most direct Method he can find to compass this End, is to destroy the Authority of God's Word, his Industry will ever be exerted to accomplish this Purpose, by suggesting such Motives as will be most likely to prevail with us, to depend on the Strength and Soundness of our own Understandings; and to receive all Instruction from the Word of God with such Prepossessions and Prejudices, as may be most successful to defeat it's Influence upon our Lives.

From this Source of his Industry, all Heretical Doctrines are derived; and all superstitious, impious, and enthusiastick Falsehoods, and Forgeries; and therefore when we view the World under the present Disorders with which it is afflicted, by the Wickedness of Men contending and supplanting, and destroying one another, by the Violence of open War, or by the hidden or secret Counsels of Envy or Pride, or Covetousness, these Effects are to be imputed to the successful Lies of the Devil, which our Saviour having foreseen, did pronounce, *Wo unto the World, because of Offences.*

The Captain of our Salvation, the Prince of Peace, came to establish Peace on Earth, and good Will towards Men, from God their Father, being reconciled to them through his Mediation; but this End cannot be obtained, until we submit to his Laws, and acknowledge his Authority, by believing in his Name, that is, in his Almighty Power; so that the Enemy of Peace, and of the Establishment of the Kingdom of God upon Earth, will

attempt to dethrone our Lord, by denying his Right as God, to possess the Seat of his Kingdom on Earth; and to this Account the Labours of the Arch-Hereticks are to be placed, such as *Arius*, and *Socinus*, and their numberless Followers, who have contributed by their Agreement in the Whole or some Part of their Doctrines, to propagate their Impostures throughout the World.

To the like Account also we must reckon the Labours of those Men in the last Days, who are not content to be instructed from the Fountain of his Wisdom, in whom *dwelleth all the Fulness of the Godhead bodily*; and who was therefore most fit to be our Teacher by living in the Body, and conversing personally among Mankind: The Men we are now speaking of, are fain to be wiser than his Apostle, who mentions it as an Argument of the highest Credit due to his Ministry, that he would *come in the Fulness of the Blessing of the Gospel of Christ*: For the Moralists of these Days seek after some other Authority for the Support of their Discipline, which they chuse rather to bring from the Schools of the *Grecian* and *Roman* Philosophers, and after their Example to become wise in their own Conceits, beyond what is written by the Spirit of God for their Instruction: By the Mixture of the Christian Doctrines, with the Philosophy of those Schools, the deceitful Arguments and Distinctions were derived, by which the earliest Opposition was maintained against believing in the Name of Christ, in Acknowledgment of his Divinity; and from the same Fountains are drawn those heretical and sophistical Institutions taken up in the Pride of human

man Learning, which do at present infest and perplex the Church of Christ.

But of such Doctrines, and the Promoters of them, we have clear Discovery and Warning given us in the Word of God; *for the Time will come (says the Apostle) when they will not endure sound Doctrine; but, after their own Lusts, shall they heap to themselves Teachers, having itching Ears; and they shall turn away their Ears from the Truth, and be turned unto Fables.* That Time has come, when the wise Men of the World will not endure sound Doctrine, according to the Simplicity of the Gospel-revelation, but after their own Lusts shall they heap to themselves Teachers; a Multitude of them, one after another, moralizing and dictating Laws of Nature, in Self-sufficiency of Wisdom; urging their Authority to their Hearers, having itching Ears, out of Curiosity to learn some new Thing, different from what our Lord and his Apostles have taught; *and they shall turn away their Ears from the Truth,* which they have no Relish for, as not at all agreeing with those exalted Notions they have conceived from their Teachers, of the Dignity of human Nature: So that, instead of Truth and sound Doctrine, they *shall be turned to Fables,* to philosophick Speeches, and Systems of high Conceit.

It has proceeded also from the usurped and avowed Licence of dictating to one another in Matters of Morality, without Appeal to any other Authority, but the Rectitude and Clearness of their own Understandings, that we have heard Teachers in these last Days, who have argued boldly against all Authority, to make their own, or

our own Reason, a Standard of all Truth that we should believe and practise.

What the Consequences of such Sort of self-sufficient Doctrines are, we learn also from the same Apostle, describing the Persons who are to be found in these last Days, when he tells us, *perilous Times shall come, for Men shall be Lovers of their own Selves*, in high Conceit with their own Abilities and Understandings; and, therefore, it follows, they shall be also *covetous, Boasters, proud, Blasphemers, disobedient to Parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural Affection, Truce-breakers, false Accusers, incontinent, fierce, Despisers of those that are good, Traitors, heady, high-minded, Lovers of Pleasures, more than Lovers of God; having a Form of Godliness*, molded according to the Fancy of the Moralist or Deist, *but denying the Power thereof* in the Gospel of Christ, from whence alone it can be derived; and from whence all the refined Lessons of Morality are taken fraudulently, which these Teachers would impose upon their Hearers for the genuine Fruits of their own improved Reason and Understandings.

From this great Offence, of appropriating to ourselves the Wisdom of God's Word, and disowning its Authority, such perilous Times are come, that Infidelity is propagated along with divine Instruction, and the Truths of the Gospel-revelation are retailed as of their own Stock and Invention, by Enthusiasts, whose Names are taken up, to give Sanction and Authority to their moral Discourses, independent, and exclusive of that Authority which is derived by believing in the Name of our Lord. By such Persons practising upon the Word
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of God, and gaining Credit for their Pretensions, an Example is given, to conceive very highly of the Dignity of human Nature, and of our own Wisdom and Understandings; from whence it does easily pass into a Rule of Life, that our own Reason must be sufficient to guide us; which may be expressed in other Words, that every Man has a Right to do as he thinks fit, or according to his own Notions of the Fitness of Things; a Maxim that does appear to be established by the general Consent and Corruption of Mankind. So that, if some Respect is shewn to the Laws of the Land, by those Persons who are not able to evade them, no Respect at all is given to the Laws of God, whose Authority is abrogated and set aside from enforcing what he has commanded to be observed.

Upon a View of this State of the World, when the divine Truths of the Gospel are every where published and declared among us, we may see clearly how the Apostle's Prediction is fulfilled, *that perilous Times shall come*; and why our Lord did pronounce *Wo unto the World, because of Offences*.

From the Observations that have been made upon these Words, we may collect what Ease and Assurance can be derived from them, for the Quiet and Peace of our Minds, amidst the Rage of those Distempers with which the World is afflicted by the Wickedness and Violence of sinful Men; for all these Disorders are clearly foretold by the Word of God. So that when the most subtle and refined Politicians are at a Loss to discern their Way, thro' the perplexed and uncertain State of human Affairs, by Recourse to God's Word, we may have
clear

clear Instruction concerning the Cause and the Issue of all those distressing and grievous Calamities, which have obscured the Ways of God, in the Course of his Providence, and raised Objections to his Government of the World.

According to our own Reasonings, we shall ever be led to make Account of the Actions of Men, by imputing them to those Principles which lie open to be judged of by Sight; and so it comes to pass that we accuse one another for Injuries which are done in private Societies, as arising from our Pride or Envy, or Lust or Covetousness, or some other Passion, which we conclude might be subdued or cast off by the Power of our own Minds, without any other Assistance or Strength, than what we are naturally endued with: And by the same Reason we proceed to account for the public Violations of the Peace of the World, through the Ambition of Princes, and the crafty Designs of evil Counsellors, to whose Guidance or Direction they are subject.

But in this reckoning we fall short of the true Account that is to be made up concerning the course of this present World, for the Pride and Ambition, and other mischevicious Passions of Mankind, would not prevail in holding us under Subjection to them; if they were not strengthened, encouraged and supported by the Enemy of our Souls, who has, in Opposition to the Light of God's Truth, sent forth his Lies, which wicked Men lay hold upon, who love Darkness, rather than Light because their Deeds are evil; from whence it is, that the Method observed by the God of this World,

World, to retain it under his Subjection, is to defeat the Influence and Authority of God's Word, by casting Offences in our Way, to divert our Attention from the Pursuit of God's Commandments; and by his Success in propagating Infidelity, and hindering our Belief in the Name of Christ, he has full Assurance, that we shall walk according to the Sight of our own Eyes, and follow such Counsels and Devices, as are suitable to the original Corruption and Depravity of our Nature, which he had introduced.

And as he did at first prevail against us, by blinding our Understandings, and alluring us to disbelieve and forsake divine Truth, to believe in his Lies; he knows our Recovery depends upon forsaking his Lies and Offences, through the Grace of God, to rest our Souls and our Happiness upon the Authority of his Word.

From these Considerations we may observe yet farther, what Sort of Design those Men are engaged in, who are busied either by their Impious and idle Discourses, or by their studied Arguments and Labours, to raise up Prejudices to offend their Brethren, to pervert them from the Faith, and Belief in the Name of Christ.

It may be, according to our short-sighted and shallow Understandings, we shall conclude, that the Effect of such idle Words and Discourses, does, immediately pass away soon after they are uttered, and the Jest and Scoffs of profane and irreligious Persons, may be supposed to vanish and expire altogether in that Fit of Merriment or Laughter, for which they appear to be spoken or written, and
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are only successful to bring Applause and Admiration of his Wit, who was bold to introduce them. But what Solomon has said may direct us to a true Estimation of this Sort of jesting *as a Mad-man, who casteth Firebrands, Arrows, and Death, so is the Man who deceiveth his Neighbour, and saith, am I not in Sport ?*

From this Comparison we may learn also how to regard their Industry and Endeavours, who have laboured seriously and earnestly, by long repeated Arguments and Efforts, to raise up Offences, to root out the Faith, and to establish Infidelity instead of Belief in the Name of Christ.

These Men who would desire to be esteemed the benevolent Protectors or Benefactors of Mankind, have never yet been able to shew us, in what respect the World would be amended, in Case we should take their Discourses to rely upon as a System of Religion, instead of the Gospel, nor what Evils would arise if we were all of us faithful to the Name of our Lord; so that perhaps the very best Account that can be given of their benevolent Designs, must be allowed to terminate in an exceeding Desire of giving Proof of their own Self-sufficiency of Understanding, to get a Name thereby in the World, and to be had in Admiration as Reformers of it; but as this Design interferes with, and opposes the Authority of Divine Revelation, their Appetite for Fame is most dangerous in its Consequences; for it is connected, and very nearly corresponds to the Thirst of Blood in those mighty Conquerors of the Earth,
who

who to make themselves a Name in the Sport of Ambition, have fought Battles for their Glory, and murdered Thousands of their Brethren.

Therefore as the Word of God is sharper than any two-edged Sword, beware of offending against it by Wantonness or Presumption, but let us walk with due Circumspection and Reverence towards him to whom it doth belong, and learn from thence to *work out your own Salvation with Fear, and Trembling* all the Days of your Lives.



SERMON

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SERMON IV.



St. MATTHEW, xviii. 7.

Wo unto the World, because of Offences ; for it must needs be that Offences come : But Wo to that Man, by whom the Offence cometh.



OUR Blessed Lord hath not only informed us of the Cause of those great Calamities which were to come upon the World, because of Offences, which have been considered in the foregoing Discourse ; but his Word proceeds yet farther to assure us, that this Cause of Wo and Distress would certainly arise ; *for it must needs be that Offences come* ; and, therefore, it concerns us to enquire, how this Prediction is to be understood,
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The Second
Sermon on
this Subject.

consistently with God's Mercy to the World ; for accomplishing the Salvation of Mankind.

As the Enemy of Mankind did at first prevail in perverting our first Parents from the Truth, by his Invention of a Lie ; we are taught also by the Authority of God's Word, that he still continues to oppose our Recovery from his Snares, and to defeat the Purposes of God for our Salvation, by his Devices, which are intended to destroy or suppress the Truth ; and therefore, when our Lord said, *It must needs be that Offences come* ; he gave us Instructions concerning the Designs of our Enemy, that he would certainly make his Attempts upon the World, to hold it in Subjection to Sin, which he had at first introduced ; and as all Men are born in Sin, and continue subject to it, until they are born again, or regenerated by the Spirit of God, through Faith in his Name ; the Enemy of our Souls will most certainly endeavour, to defeat and obstruct this Change ; and to retain that Advantage which he has by our corrupted Nature obtained over all Mankind : From whence it is, that the Apostle in writing *To the Saints at Ephesus, and to the Faithful in Christ Jesus*, does particularly inform them of this Truth, that they and all other Christians whatsoever, before their Conversion to the Faith in *Christ*, were held under the Power of the Devil, so as to be accounted dead in the Sight of God, until they were raised up to a new Life by believing in his Name, or, according to the Apostle's own Words, *and you hath he quickened, who were dead in Trespasses and Sins, wherein, in Time past, ye walked according to the Course of this World,*
according

according to the Prince of the Power of the Air, the Spirit that now worketh in the Children of Disobedience; among whom also, we all had our Conversation in Times past, in the Lusts of the Flesh; fulfilling the Desires of the Flesh, and of the Mind; and were, by Nature, the Children of Wrath, even as others.

By this Account, it appears, that the Children of Disobedience, who will not believe and obey the Gospel, become Instruments to the Prince of the Power of the Air, who now worketh in them, according to his Craft and Subtilty, not only to keep them in Subjection to his Will, but also to employ their Service in propagating his Lies against the Truth; to subvert the Faith, and ruin the Souls of their innocent Brethren; or to bring those back again to Infidelity, who had escaped from his Snares: So that wicked Men, *fulfilling the Desires of the Flesh, and of the Mind*, enslaved to evil Habits, will incessantly contend and labour to undermine the Truth, by giving Offences to their Brethren by their evil Examples, and by all Arguments they can find, to unsettle and disturb their Minds, to lead them astray from the Faith, or Belief in the Name of *Christ*.

The same Instruction our Lord hath also conveyed to us, in his Parable of the Tares of the Field; in which he tells us, that *the Kingdom of Heaven is likened unto a Man which sowed good Seed in his Field*. That State of the World which was under the Dispensation of the Gospel, did resemble the Field of an Householder, who had sowed it with good Seed; *but while Men slept*, in such Condition that they could not per-

ceive the Actions of a spiritual invisible Agent, *his Enemy came, and sowed Tares among the Wheat, and went his Way.* The Enemy cast into the World, after the Word of God was sown, some of his own Lies and Impostures, and went his Way, unobserved: *But when the Blade was sprung up, and brought forth Fruit, then appeared the Tares also.* So soon as the Followers and Disciples of *Christ* began to bring forth Fruit, by publishing his Doctrine to the World, and making Converts to the Truth, *then appeared the Tares also:* The Lies of the Enemy grew up also, and were published by his Instruments; maintaining the Cause of Infidelity, by their Example and Arguments, in Opposition to the Truth: *So the Servants of the Householder came and said to him, Sir, didst not thou sow good Seed in thy Field? From whence then hath it Tares? He said unto them, an Enemy hath done this.* According to the original Expression, it is, an Enemy-man hath done this; a Man, the Instrument of the Enemy.

The Servants said unto him, wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? But he said, nay; lest, while ye gather up the Tares, ye root up also the Wheat with them: Let both grow until the Harvest, and in the Time of Harvest, I will say to the Reapers, gather ye together first the Tares, and bind them in Bundles to burn them; but gather my Wheat into the Barn.

Our Lord was pleased to discover clearly who the Actors were, to whom he refers in this Parable, which he vouchsafed to explain particularly to his Disciples, when they besought him to *declare unto*

us the Parable of the Tares of the Field; he answered and said unto them, he that soweth good Seed, is the Son of Man; the Field is the World; the good Seed are the Children of the Kingdom of Heaven: But the Tares are the Children of the wicked One; the Enemy that sowed them is the Devil: The Harvest is the End of the World, and the Reapers are the Angels: As, therefore, the Tares are gathered and burnt in the Fire, so shall it be in the End of the World: The Son of Man shall send forth his Angels, and they shall gather out of this Kingdom all Things that offend (all Offences or Scandals;) and them which do Iniquity; and shall cast them into a Furnace of Fire: There shall be wailing and gnashing of Teeth; Then shall the Righteous shine forth as the Sun in the Kingdom of their Father.

We learn from this Parable, and the clear Interpretation of it, by what Means Offences come; that, originally, they are derived from the Devil, who must needs be employed by his Instruments to corrupt and oppose the Truth; that this Opposition will continue until the End of the World; and, before that Time, it is forbidden to the Servants of the Householder, who are the Servants of our Lord, to attempt to root out the Tares, by any Means of Violence or Persecution; and, lastly, that this Work is reserved for the Reapers, the Angels of God, in the Harvest, or End of the World, who shall make that Separation between the Wheat and the Tares, between the Children of the Kingdom, and the Children of the wicked One; which will conclude in such Difference of their Conditions; that *the Righteous shall shine*

forth as the Sun, in the Kingdom of their Father ; when the Angels shall gather out of his Kingdom all Things that offend (all Offences or Scandals;) and them which do Iniquity ; and shall cast them into a Furnace of Fire ; there shall be wailing and gnashing of Teeth.

As we have such clear Information, by whom it is that all Offences or Scandals are brought into the World, and that they must needs come through the Malice of the Devil, and the Industry of wicked Men, who are employed for that Purpose, to carry on his Designs. It will concern us yet farther to observe, by what Means it comes to pass, that Offences are readily entertained and embraced, so soon as they are published, and sent abroad into the World.

The Reason is obvious, because all false Doctrines, or false Religions, do conspire, in some Respect or other, to gratify the corrupt Inclinations of Men, *fulfilling the Desires of the Flesh, and of the Mind.* So that, by taking up Lies or Scandals, in Opposition to the Truth, they are enabled to walk on, stedfastly, in their own Ways, in Disobedience to the Word and Commandment of God.

If a Distinction is to be made, concerning the Nature of those Offences that have been from Age to Age introduced, and which have had the greatest Success and Influence upon the World, we shall find them to be chiefly of two Sorts :

I. The first is of such Offences or Scandals as do tend to encourage and support the Indulgence of the sensual Appetites of Mankind, *fulfilling the Desires of the Flesh.*

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By means of this Propensity in all Men to gratify the Lusts or Desires of the Flesh, they are readily disposed to take Offences at all such Restraints, as have a Tendency to limit or correct their Desires ; and therefore when our blessed Lord came into the World, he had this universal Prejudice of all Mankind to contend against, who were by their corrupted Nature disposed, to reject his Example and Doctrine, as not agreeable to their Notions of Happiness, which they are inclined to seek after in the Joys and Pleasures of this Life. From hence his Religion became, and has continued ever since to be a Stumbling-block to the *Jews*, who have not yet been able look through that Veil, which was cast over their Eyes by the temporal Promises of the Law for encouraging their Obedience to it ; and therefore they have continued in Blindness rejecting their *Messiah*, who abolished their Law because of the Unprofitableness of it, which they would chuse to retain for the sake of earthly Prosperity they hoped for along with it, in Preference to the spiritual Blessings of the Kingdom of the Messiah, which were foretold by the Prophets, and were offered to them in the Gospel of Christ.

Upon the same Foundation of Indulgence to be allowed to the sensual Appetites of Men, the great *Arabian* Impostor *Mahomet* has grounded his Religion, and contrived his Paradise thoroughly furnished with delightful Objects, for gratifying all the Senses of his Votaries ; and by this Artifice, of his cunning Imposture, he has been enabled to propagate his absurd and impious Forgeries,

through a much greater Extent of the Earth, than what is possessed by those who profess the true Faith in *Christ*: So that by the Help of the Delusions and Amusements for the Senses, which his Religion does afford, the Believers in *Mahomet*, or the Faithful to his Name, who was the Son of *Ishmael* the spurious Son of *Abraham*, are many more in Number, than they who have believed in the Name of *Christ*, the Son of *David*, the Son of *Abraham* according to the Truth and Promises of God.

By the same Artifice, that great Apostacy has been introduced and propagated, which has carried off the greater Part of those who are called after the Name of *Christ*, to receive corrupt Doctrines, with superstitious and idolatrous Practices in the Church of *Rome*; which has set up it's Authority above the Word of God, and has perverted the spiritual Wisdom of the Gospel, to become an Engine of temporal Policy for supporting the Tyranny and Usurpations of the Popes and mitred Princes of that Church, with their Counsellors and Assistants, who have aimed and succeeded more remarkably than any other worldly Potentates, in establishing universal Monarchy or Despotism, over the Souls and Bodies of a great Part of Mankind.

Yet even this deep and dangerous Imposture, if thoroughly examined, will be found to rest chiefly upon Amusements offered to the Senses of Mankind; for after the bold and blasphemous Invention of Infallibility, attributed to the Head of
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that Chnrch, by which the Authority of God's Word, is either superseded or suspended at his Pleasure, the Delusions in that political Scheme of Religion, do principally rely upon those outward Forms and Shews of Pomp and ceremonious Pageantry and Procession, which entertain and amuse the Fancy, and divert the Attention of the Mind to Objects of Sense ; and are therefore, contrived to baffle and to blind the Understandings of Men. Of this sort are the ornamental Robes of the high Priesthood, and the Vestments of the different Ecclesiastical Orders, or Fraternities subservient or connected with it; the tripple Crown, and the Keys to open a Door in Heaven ; the magnificent Decorations of Churches, Chappels and Altars, their Musick, Images, and Paintings, their cunning Inventions of mock Miracles, and Legends of Saints, which have wonderful Efficacy, to retain the acutest Men by their Eyes and their Ears, who have been trained up from their Infancy, in Reverence to those superstitious Delusions.

Besides, in this Scheme of superficial Worship, there is much Ease provided for the Minds of Men, who are set free from all painful Enquiries about Truth, to take it upon the Word of the Priests, who are instructed, for good Reasons of State, to keep their Hearers in strict Obedience of bodily Exercise, and are warranted by their Form of Religion, to speak Peace to their Consciences, by Pardons and Absolutions granted on such Terms of Prayer or Penance, as might afford an easy Entrance for Sinners into Heaven.

To this same Purpose, those Commodities are prepared, which pass in Traffick under the Seal of that Church, which are sold and bought as Tokens of Conveyance of a Title for Sinners, to hold an Interest, or to take Possessions in the Kingdom of Heaven.

To which End also, the Doctrine of Purgatory had been advanced, which is an Art of recovering Souls from Hell to Heaven, if proper Application is made to the Power of that Church.

By this dangerous Address of making Court to the Senses, with a prospect of Indulgence, and favourable Concessions to be made for fulfilling the Desires of the Flesh; while the Fancy is amused with superstitious and idolatrous Acts of Mock-worship, the Votaries of that Church are deluded from believing in the Words, or in the Name of *Christ*, to any better Purpose, than as they would believe in Charms or Inchantments, which are to be applied in a certain Form of Words, as the *Romanists* repeat their Prayers, without any Use or Application of their Understandings, to apprehend or consider the Meaning of them. As the Design of these Corruptions which have been introduced into the *Roman* Church, was to retain the Understandings of Men in Subjection to their Appetites *fulfilling the Desires of the Flesh*; to which all Mankind by their corrupt Nature are inclined; it may be presumed, that such sort of religious and formal Delusions or Offences, are most likely to have the greatest Influence upon all Conditions of Men over the Face of the Earth; which is accordingly confirmed by Experience in
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the Success of the *Romish* and *Mahometan* Impostures ; which do in another Article closely correspond, that for the Security and Assurance of their respective Interests, it must ever be accounted a certain Maxim of their political Prudence, to discourage in their Subjects as much as possible all Attempts of the Mind to excell, either in divine or human Learning, any farther than as they are led in hand and conducted by the Priests, who are appointed by Authority to be the Guardians and Masters of the Understandings of their People : From whence it comes, that Ignorance, is very properly said to be the Mother of Devotion, towards Antichrist, the the visible infallible Head of the *Romish* Church.

2. But there is another kind of Opposition to the Truth or Faith in *Christ*, which has been made to raise up Offences against it, by skilful Address and Flattery paid to the Understandings of Men, highly magnified and exalted in their Attainments of divine and natural Knowledge, through the Industry of their own Endeavours, and the successful Application and Vigour of their own Minds, in Contemplations and Enquiries after Divine, and Moral, Astronomical, Physical, Metaphysical and Mathematical Truths, excelling in Speculations upon these Subjects, affording such Variety of Employment, and rational Entertainment for their Understandings, as make it easy for them to conceive, they apprehend so perfectly the whole System of the Moral and Natural World, as to stand in need of no other Instructions but what arise from their own Reason rightly applied, to examine and consider the Relations and Fitness of Things.

In

In the former Days the Enemy had his Advantage to sow his Tares, while Men slept in Ignorance, in dark Ages of Barbarism; in these last Days, to counterballance our Boastings in the Revival of Learning, he has made good Use of it to serve his own Purposes, to create Offences of the most deceitful and dangerous Opposition to the Truth, or Belief in the Name of *Christ*.

But of the Success of this kind of Opposition, he had Experience long since in the earliest Days of the Gospel, which was to the *Greeks* Foolishness; on this very Account, because they thought they had Wisdom enough in the Schools of their Philosophers, to know how to act, and govern their Lives, without any Instruction from *St. Paul*, or his fellow *Workers to the Kingdom of God*.

Through the Means of those Conceits in which Men have been lifted up in the Pride of human Learning, the Enemy got his Advantage more especially for making an artificial Rock of Offence, by forging Demonstrations of the Being and Attributes of God, and from thence producing such Evidences of natural Religion, as might suffice to supersede all Evidences of revealed Religion, as worthy of Belief no farther, than as it coincides with the Discovery of the natural Relations and Fitnesses of Things; which by a proper Attention, and Application of our improved Understandings, may be sufficiently apprehended, to become a Rule of Life, to all sober, diligent, and rational Enquirers; so that the Masters and Adepts in natural Religion, are able to conclude with Certainty, how far, and how much, and what Sort

of Declaration of his Will God must make to Mankind, if he is pleased to reveal it to them ; allowing also, that Revelation may indeed be of Use for instructing by Authority the illiterate vulgar, and unthinking Part of Mankind, and to such of Course it may expedient, to take Faith as a collateral Principle, to enforce Obedience to their Duty ; whereas to others, who are Masters in the Sciences, they have Knowledge rested on a sure Foundation of demonstrative Certainty, and the Evidences of natural and revealed Religion lie together in their Minds under such a Process of clear Reasoning and Argument, that they can have no need to appeal to the Gospel of Christ, if it were not for some positive Institutions, which according to their Method of distinguishing, must be always superseded by moral Obligations.

They who have been taken into this Train of sophistical, presumptuous, and blasphemous Reasoning, may find it hard to escape from that Triumph which the Enemy of their Souls has gained over their Understandings ; as by this Method of his Policy he has contrived to preclude them from having Recourse to the Word of God for their Deliverance, by which alone it can be wrought : And of all those Delusions which have passed upon the World through his Industry, this Imposture of Self-sufficiency of Wisdom, is of the most deceitful and dangerous Tendency, to cut us off from all Help and Assistance from the Holy Spirit of God.

But by his Knowledge, which is infinite, and by his Mercy and Goodness having no Bounds towards

wards us, we have such Declarations of the crafty and subtile Designs, of the great Deceiver and his Instruments, laid before us in the holy Scriptures, that by the Light of God's Word, we may be able to discern, and dissolve, and to disperse all the Lies of the Devil. And therefore, without entering into Combat with those pretended Demonstrations, which are built on a false Principle, and presumptive Concessions which are not to be granted, we are able by the Authority of God's Word, to find Rest unto our Souls, being freed from those high Conceits, by which it has come to pass, that, *the preaching of the Cross, is to them that perish Foolishness, but unto us that are saved, it is the Power of God: For it is written, I will destroy the Wisdom of the Wise, and bring to nothing the Understanding of the Prudent; where is the Wise? Where is the Scribe? Where is the Disputer of this World? Hath not God made foolish the Wisdom of this World? For after that, in the Wisdom of God, the World by Wisdom knew not God; it pleased God by the Foolishness of Preaching to save them that believe.*

For after that, in the Wisdom of God displayed in his Works of Creation, and Providence, the World by Wisdom derived from their Observations on his Works, knew not God, were never able, as it is now pretended, to know, or to demonstrate his Being and Attributes, *it pleased God, by a Method of Instruction which passed with the Philosophers for the Foolishness of preaching, to save them that believe.*

According to this Instruction, from the Word of God, to which the Experience of all Ages bears Witness, since the Beginning of the World, until these

these last Days, after all the Trials, and incessant Efforts that have been made by the human Understanding, we conclude with the Apostle, that, *the World by Wisdom knew not God*; the wisest Men in it, were never able, by their own Reasonings to know, much less to demonstrate to others the Being of the true God, or the Laws of his Will for the Government of Mankind; and the spurious Arguments now offered, for that Purpose, by modern Enthusiasts, are surreptitiously taken from holy Scripture, mixed up and blended with high Conceits of human Learning, falsely and deceitfully applied.

The human Mind has it's own Principle of Knowledge, derived by the Senses for the Foundation of it's Reasoning; and from this Principle it cannot rise to spiritual Objects, until it is aided by another Principle, conveyed from the Word of God, and it's Actions strengthened by the Assistance of his Spirit, in Attainment of the Knowledge of heavenly Things; so that altho' we may admire the Wisdom of moral and political OEconomy, and those bright Examples of social Virtues, which did appear in the flourishing States of *Athens*, and of *Rome*, highly distinguished in all Ornaments of civil Life, by their Knowledge and Excellence in liberal and mechanick Arts; yet in Regard to all Advances they did, or could make in spiritual Knowledge, for Discovery of the true Religion, by their own Understandings unassisted by divine Revelation, both they and we are upon a Level with the meanest of our Brethren, the poor illiterate Savages

vages of the Sea Shore, or the naked Indians of the Woods.

From these Considerations, suggested to us by what our blessed Lord has said, *it must needs be that Offences come*; we should be warned against the Designs of our spiritual Enemy, who has cast very dangerous Offences in our Way, to betray us into his Snares, by diverting our Attention, and our Understandings from the Word of Truth and Faith in the Name of *Christ*, to rest our Happiness and Salvation, upon the Wisdom of this World, in a presumptuous Self-sufficiency in our own Judgment and Reasoning.

By the former Method of his Address, making Court to the sensual Appetites of Men, he has retained whole Regions of the Earth, great Nations and Kingdoms of the World in a general Apostacy, or in a continued Opposition to the Faith in *Christ*; holding them fast under such false Principles of Religion, as do effectually obstruct, or overturn the Purity of the Christian Revelation: And by the latter Device of making Court to the Understandings of Men; in those Parts of the World where the Light of the Gospel has shewn forth in Purity of Doctrine, the Enemy has built *Strong Holds*, to take in his select Champions, combating with the Faith, by sophistical Arguments of human Learning misunderstood, and misapplied; who have made vigorous Efforts to recover what was lost on their Side, by the Reformation of Religion from those dangerous Errors and Heresies, with which it had been obscured, in dark Ages of Ignorance and superstitious Credulity.

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It is too well seen what Success they have had by the avowed unlimited Licentiousness of these last Days, which has been encouraged and abetted by them ; but by the Mercy of God, the inestimable Treasure of his Word is yet in our Hands, without any corrupt Mixtures, opened to our View in our own Language, from whence we may derive such Comfort and Support, as will preserve us from all Attempts and Assaults of our spiritual Adversaries ; for the Words of our blessed Master are designed to deliver us from all the Deceits of the World, of the Devil, and of the Flesh, and the self-sufficient Teachers of new Doctrines ; therefore instead of their Wisdom, let us take Instruction from our Saviour's divine Sermon on the Mount, and faithfully endeavour to live according to it : and then we shall have his sure Promise of spiritual Strength ; to encourage and bear us up against all the Trials and Troubles, Perplexities and Distresses, which surround us in this present World ; for so he has himself assured us, *Whosoever beareth these Sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him ; by my Grace and Strength I will make him like unto a wise Man, which built his House upon a Rock ; and the Rain descended, and the Floods came, and the Winds blew and beat upon that House, and it fell not, for it was founded upon a Rock : And every one that beareth these Sayings of mine and doeth them not, shall be likened, through the Artifice and Industry of the evil Spirit, he shall be made like unto a foolish Man, which built his House upon the Sand, where it continued for some short Time of fair Weather, and the Master dwelt carelessly in it ;*
but

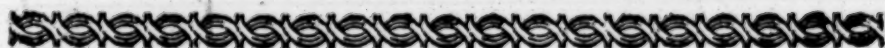
but so soon as it came to be tried by Storms and Tempests, to which every House in this World must needs be exposed, the Badness of it's Foundation was quickly discovered, *for the Rain descended, and the Floods came, and the Winds blew, and beat upon that House, and it fell, and great was the Fall of it; never more to be repaired.*



SERMON



SERMON V.



St. MATTHEW xviii. 7.

Wo unto the World, because of Offences; for it must needs be that Offences come: But Wo to that Man, by whom the Offence cometh.



HAVING considered, in the foregoing Discourses, to what Wo or Misery the World is subject, from

The Third
Sermon on
this Subject.

Offences or Scandals arising in it, the Nature of which we have enquired into, and shewn likewise, according to our Saviour's Prediction, *it must needs be that Offences come*; it now remains to be examined,

3. What Misery or Danger he is exposed to, who brings in such Offences, for our Lord hath pronounced, *Wo to that Man, by whom the Offence cometh.*

As the Enemy of our Salvation does act his Part to divert our Attention from the Truth, and Faith in the Word of God, by stirring up an Op-
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position to it, through the Example and Industry of Men, who are gained over to his Side by their own Lufts, *in fulfilling the Desires of the Flesh, and of the Mind*; it follows from hence, that there is a Distinction to be made, according to the Characters of Men, following their Principles, and they are either *the Children of this World, or the Children of Light*.

The former, that is, the Children of this World, are directed in the Course of their Lives, by ordering their Actions in such Manner, as may best conspire to secure their Interests in this Life, for Enjoyment of Honour or Power, or Pleasures or Profits in it: And, as their Wisdom does consist in making the best Provision they can, for gratifying their Appetites, by seizing upon those Objects of Sense which are most suitable to their Taste, and their Temper and Circumstances in the World, they are said to *walk by Sight*; as, on the other Hand, *the Children of Light*, who disclaim that Principle of Action in the Government of their Lives, they are said to *walk by Faith*.

As these Principles are contrary, the one to the other, and lead different Ways; one tending unto the Earth, and the other unto Heaven: There is Enmity between the Children of this World and the Children of Light, while each Party endeavours to retain those who are already with them, or to gain others over to their Principle and Opinions.

The chief Method observable in the Policies of the Children of this World, for establishing their Principle, is what we have already mentioned, concerning their Industry and Address, in creating
Offences

Offences to divert or betray the Understandings of their Brethren, from due Attention and Regard to the Word of God, upon which our Faith and our Salvation do depend.

From hence we see what the Employment of such a Man is, *by whom the Offence cometh*; for he who is successful to ensnare the Souls of other Men, and to lead them astray from the Truth, into sinful Compliances, he conspires with the Purposes of the great Deceiver, and acts under the Guidance and Direction of his Power.

As our Lord is concerned on the opposite Side, to defend and save those who believe in his Name, he has pronounced, *Wo to that Man by whom the Offence cometh.*

This Declaration added, in Consequence of what our Lord had said before, concerning the Misery of the World arising from Offences, does imply, that they, by whom these Offences are given, will be accountable for them in a very severe Degree of Punishment, proportionable to their Guilt.

But that every Man may be warned to have due Caution towards the Welfare of his own Soul, our Lord has declared, how little we ought to esteem those Things which are most precious to us in this World, when they become an Occasion of leading us in Opposition to our everlasting Interest, by offending against the Word or the Commandment of God; to which Purpose he has said, *if thy Hand or thy Foot offend thee, cut it off, and cast them from thee: It is better for thee to enter into Life, halt or maimed, rather than having two Hands or two*

Feet to be cast into everlasting Fire. And if thine Eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee; it is better for thee to enter into Life with one Eye, rather than having two Eyes to be cast into everlasting Fire.

It is easy to understand, from this Method of his Instruction, that no Temptation to Disobedience, be it ever so great, if it were even to the Value of our right Hand or right Eye, can afford us an Equivalent for the Loss we must sustain by complying with it.

To carry on his Argument, with respect to those Offences which are given to ensnare the Souls of other Men, it follows, that as the Temptation to this Wickedness does arise from some View of gratifying our Pride or Self-conceit, in propagating false Opinions and heretical Doctrines, our Guilt, in this Instance, is the more inexcusable, and will, accordingly, be punished by greater Severity, in the Judgment of God, according to that Misery they occasion in the World. *Wo unto that Man, by whom the Offence cometh.* The Expression is such, as if it pointed at a particular Person, to such a Man, who has been a notable Teacher or Leader in the Science of propagating Infidelity, of which there have been several, very eminent in different Ages of the World.

- What our Lord has said in those Words, is sufficient to alarm us to beware of creating Offences, in this Kind, to betray or seduce our Brethren, as the Displeasure of Almighty God is threatened against such Persons, in a remarkable Expression of *Wo unto them.*

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But although we are to conceive the Judgment of God upon them is reserved unto a future State of their Misery, yet there is also a Foundation to conjecture from Holy Scripture, that in this Life they are regarded by him more peculiarly as Objects of his Displeasure, than any other Class of Sinners; for of them who *resist the Truth*, which they do most remarkably who are busied in creating Lies or Offences against it, as the Magicians withstood *Moses* by lying Miracles, we are told, that they are *Men of corrupt Minds, Reprobate, concerning the Faith*, or more exactly according to the original Expression, they are Men corrupted and debased in their Understandings, unable to bear the Light of God's Truth, like base Metal which cannot abide the Trial of Purity; from whence the Expression appears to be taken in the Words of the Prophet, *Reprobate Silver shall Men call them, because the Lord hath rejected them.*

As our Recovery from any sinful Course of Life, does intirely depend upon our Return to the Faith, the Condition of such Persons is most hopeless and desperate, who are given over to a reprobate Mind, which is the same, as to be held in the Sight of God, *Reprobate concerning the Faith.*

From hence it may be accounted for in the Experience of Mankind, that they who have learned to resist the Truth, and to attempt the Faith of them who believe in the Name of *Christ*, by publishing infidel or heretical Performances, they may be remarked as void of Ingenuity, and

incapable of confessing the Truth, though their Errors have been abundantly discussed and exposed, by clear Evidence, and Conviction to other Men.

Concerning the future State of the Misery of such Offenders, we need not enquire more particularly, than as it may be concluded from the high Degree of their Guilt in the Judgment of God ; so that when our Lord has said, with respect to other Sinners who live wickedly in Opposition to the Faith, *whosoever falleth on this Stone, shall be broken*, his Designs and Counsels shall certainly come to Ruin, whosoever in his own private Practices, shall offend against it, though he has no evil Purpose, to undermine the Faith of other Men, he adds, *but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to Powder* ; he who resists the Truth, and hath set himself in Opposition to the Word of God, by raising Offences against it, his Destruction will be more remarkable and exemplary, that Stone hangs over his Head, which falling upon him, will conclude his State with endless Perdition of Soul and Body.

From what our blessed Lord has said, concerning Offences, and the Observations that have been made upon his Words, we may properly be led to reflect upon the various Methods of Opposition which have been employed by the Enemy of our Faith, according to the Progress of divine Revelation, vouchsafed for the Recovery of Mankind from his Snares.

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In the first Ages of the World, the Opposition to Faith was made by Idolatry arising from the Imaginations of Men, being misled to visible Objects of Worship, recommended by their Senses, as capable of promoting or preventing their Happiness in this Life; from whence arose the Worship of the heavenly Bodies or Planets, and of the Elements of the Earth.

After *Abraham* was called upon to believe in the true God, who had revealed himself to him, and was pleased to be known to his Posterity, by the Name of the God of *Abraham*, the God of *Isaac*, and the God of *Jacob*, a new Species of Idolatry was introduced, by Images, made in the human Form, to represent the principal Ancestors of a Family, or the Benefactors of a Nation; and thus the Souls of departed Men were worshipped as Guardians or Protectors of the Family or Nation to which they did belong.

When the Laws of the spiritual Kingdom of God, or of the Kingdom of Heaven, were revealed by the Son of God to the World, and that Religion was from thence forward to consist in a spiritual Service recommended by the Practice of those spiritual Graces or Virtues, which make us acceptable in the Sight of God; when we come to understand by the Gospel, that *God is a Spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in Spirit and in Truth*; from hence forward, the Method of Opposition to the Faith is varied, as the Service of God is varied, from the external Observances of the *Jewish Law*, unto the Purity of the Christian

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Worship,

Worship, in Spirit and in Truth ; and as under the Law, the Opposition to it was made chiefly by the Worship of Idols in the human Form ; so likewise under the Gospel which enlightened and improved the Understandings of Men, the Corruption of the Faith began with undue Respect, or Reverence paid to the Spiritual Powers or Abilities of Men, the Enemy from hence taking Advantage to detract from, or to diminish the Authority of the Word of God.

So we find in one of the first Christian Churches, planted by St. Paul, that he complains of this Matter in the first Chapter of his first Epistle to the *Corinthians*, *Now I beseech you Brethren, by the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same Thing, and that there be no Divisions among you, but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same Mind and in the same Judgment,* (an agreement which is now confidently said to be impossible, and so no doubt it is, until the Offence derived from human Authority be removed, of which the Apostle is complaining,) *for it hath been declared unto me of you my Brethren, that there are Contentions among you ;* and then he proceeds to shew how this was occasioned, *now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul, and I of Apollos, and I of Cephas, and I of Christ.*

Here we see the Attempt was begun to set up other Names and Authorities, in Competition with the Authority of the Church of *Christ* : For so much is intimated by the Apostle's Expression, that among these first Converts to the Christian Faith,
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one said I am of the Church of *Paul*, another I am of the Church of *Apollos*, a third, I am of the Church of *Cephas* or *Peter*, and a fourth, I am of the Church of *Christ*; to which the Apostle replies, *is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were you baptized in the Name of Paul?* and if not, how comes it to pass, that ye receive Instruction under any other Name or Authority, but in the Name, and by the Authority of our Lord *Jesus Christ*.

Then the Apostle proceeds by a very long and strict Course of Argument to shew, that the Wisdom of this World, in which he comprehends all human Learning of what Kind soever, was utterly insufficient to conduct Men to the Knowledge of God; and therefore it pleased God, by a Method of Instruction which appeared to the Wise Men of the Word, to be *the Foolishness of Preaching*, to save them that believe; for the natural Man, receiveth not the Things of the Spirit of God, for they are Foolishness to him; neither can he know them because they are spiritually discerned. By the natural Man he understands any Person the most accomplished in that Wisdom, which may be derived from our own Experience and Observations made upon outward sensible Things, according to our natural Abilities of Reasoning upon them: And as all the Knowledge we can acquire in this Method of human Learning, can never lead us to know the Mind of God, in regard to what concerns our Salvation, no Man can have any Thing as of himself, to make his Authority of any Weight at all in the Church of *Christ*: So that wheresoever

ever there are Contentions about Doctrines advanced by one Teacher set up in Opposition to another, the Apostle's Argument takes place against them, *ye are yet carnal, for whereas there is among you Envy and Strife and Divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as Men? for while one saith I am of Paul, and another I am of Apollos, are ye not carnal? who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but Ministers by whom ye believed? who had nothing to add to your Faith of their own Invention, but delivered to you only what they had received, even as the Lord gave to every Man, I have planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the Increase. Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one. All the Ministers of the Gospel though distinguished by different Names of Paul and Apollos and Cephas, they are but one in respect to that Authority under which they preach; they have nothing to contribute of their own to it, therefore let a Man so account of us, as of the Ministers of Christ his Servants to declare his Will only, and Stewards of the Mysteries of God, dispensing and making known that hidden Wisdom, which was a Mystery from the Beginning of the World, until it was revealed to us by the Son of God. Moreover it is required in Stewards, that a Man be found faithful; a good Steward will distribute his Master's Goods according to his Commands, not giving any of his own Stock, or of any other Man's in Exchange, or instead of his Master's Property, but he will be faithful in his Master's Name to preserve and dispense whatsoever is committed to his Charge.*

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That the Apostle's Argument might have the greatest Weight, in discouraging and condemning an Appeal to any other Authority in Matters of Faith, but to the Word of God only ; he puts the Case in the strongest Light it can bear, by Supposition that his own Name, and the Name of *Apollo* are taken to give Authority to different Sects, *And these Things, Brethren, I have in a Figure transferred to myself, and to Apollos for your Sakes, that ye might learn in us not to think (of Men) above that which is written,* that by this Instance you might learn, that even an Apostle of *Christ*, is not at all to be accounted of, as having any Authority of his own, for your Advancement in spiritual Knowledge, above or beyond what is written by Command, through Direction of the holy Spirit of God : Therefore, with Respect to other Names, and Authorities of different Teachers, there is much more Reason, *that no one of you be puffed up for one against another.*

From hence we discover the Source of those Controversies, that have disturbed and distracted the Church of *Christ*; for we see how the Attempt began, and how quickly it was discerned by the Apostle in the Church of *Corinth*, who has pointed out the Fallacy that gave Birth to heretical and schismatical Doctrines and Opinions, which have been privily brought into the Body of the Church of *Christ*, by taking up Names and Authorities for Instruction, beyond, or *above that which is written.*

But although our Reason improved to the utmost Perfection it has ever yet attained, in all the Parts of human Learning, is insufficient to lead us to know the true God, and his Mind, in respect to
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our Duty to him, independantly of that Revelation he has been pleased to make of Himself and of his Will to us ; yet the Conclusion does not follow, that we should resign or give up our Reason as of no Use in Religion ; for when the Principle of Faith is taken from divine Revelation, the most spacious Field of reasoning is opened for the Abilities of the human Mind, improved and exercised in all Branches of human Literature, to be employed in bringing forth the Treasures of divine Wisdom from the Word of God ; and in contemplating his Works of Creation and Providence, by the Light which is cast upon them in the holy Scriptures, from whence we shall be able by due Course of Argument to discover, that the Duties of our holy Religion, are in the highest and most perfect Sense a *reasonable Service*.

The Province which belongs to mere human Learning, can extend no farther than to the Concerns of this Life, by which Individuals, and whole Nations of Men, do exceedingly differ from one another in their Address and Abilities for Action and Discourse, in Management of their Affairs in this World, from whose Forms and Movements all human Arts and Sciences are derived ; but when human Learning is taken into the Service of true Religion, it is not to dictate to our Understandings how we ought to live according to the Rules of the moral Philosopher, or the Mathematician, but to give it's Aid in *comparing Things spiritual with spiritual* ; through the Revelation made of them by the Prophets, by our Lord and his Apostles, and from thence to derive the Rules of our Duty, according to

to *that which is written*, by divine Inspiration : And as *the World by Wisdom knew not God* ; we must not allow that the NAME of GOD should be taken as it is by the Deists, who claim a Right to it, as of their own Invention, independant of divine Revelation, from whence alone it is derived to them ; but their Gods must be as their Religion is, of their own making, and then of Course they would revert to the Religion of their Ancestors, who worshipped in Figures of Wood or Stone, the Gods of the Heavens, and the Gods of the Earth.

So that after all their unwearied Attempts, and the Success they have met with in propagating Infidelity, upon due Examination of their Arguments it will be found, they have not yet said any Thing to their Purpose ; either to disprove the Religion of *Christ*, or to establish their own Conceits in it's Place.

By allowing our Adversaries the Privilege to which they who disclaim the holy Writings have no Title, but by our Concession, which has been granted unawares, that they should use the holy Name of God Almighty, without adhering to his Word, as a perfect Comment upon his Works, and making the Scriptures our only Guide in Matters of Faith ; the human Understanding has been laid open to be practised upon by all Sorts of Empirics in Religion, proposing Remedies for the Diseases of our Nature according to their own Imaginations ; and teaching us to search after Happiness, by Inventions suitable to the Fancies and Weaknesses of our present distempered Constitution ; by which Means the wisest and most sagacious
Men

Men of this World, may be readily betrayed into a Belief of the most gross and palpable Absurdities; and to rest their Hopes of Salvation, on the Blasphemy and Fables of *Mahomet*; or the daring Mockeries and Impostures of the *Romish* Church.

It is too well seen at present, what presumptuous Abuse the sacred Truths of Religion have undergone, by Means of this Licence; from whence it may be accounted for, that his holy Name, the Gift of God for our Salvation, which is not GIVEN by his WORKS, but by his WORD, is held in so little Respect and Reverence as we daily hear, either in the ordinary Discourse, or in the solemn Affirmations made by it in the Mouths of infidel wicked Men; so that the Honour due to God, to his House, and to his Worship, and to the Day on which it ought to be most solemnly performed, is superseded at Will, without any Compunction in the Minds of Men, who now look upon themselves as abundantly instructed by the Light of Nature, under the Assistance of their rational self-sufficient Teachers, to discern the Superstition and Superfluity of all positive Institutions, which have not their Sanction and Authority from their own Understandings.

It is true, the Moralists or Deists are not to be accused for want of Decency, in not *having a Form of Godliness*; for they are industrious to preserve the outward Garb of it, by good Words, and fair Speeches, making high Pretences to social and moral Virtues, and to recommend universal Benevolence as a true Principle of Religion; by which we may be taught to understand, that our Happiness does depend on our good Will to one another, manifested in performing the moral and social Duties

ties respecting our Welfare in this Life; to which also we are obliged, as they say, by a due Attention to the Dignity of our Nature, far exalted above the Level of all other Creatures of the Earth: But in discanting upon these Principles, the beloved Topics of their Religion, they fall short of the Truth; for the Christian Religion does recommend *brotherly Love*, in the most exalted and perfect Sense comprehending all that they would profess to inculcate by universal Benevolence: And it goes yet farther, by commanding us to add to *brotherly Kindness, Charity*; that Charity to the Souls of our Brethren, of which our blessed Master gave us the Example, in his own Behaviour to his Followers, who were instructed, not to have their Expectations fixed on his Bounty or Benevolence in making worldly Provision for them, but by encouraging and supporting their Faith in his Name he taught them to undergo the Troubles which they and all other Christians must expect to meet with in this present Life; so that when he bade farewell to his Disciples at his Departure, it was in Words to that Effect, to enliven their Faith by Assurance of his Almighty Power for their Support, *these Things I have spoken unto you, that in Me ye might have Peace, in the World ye shall have Tribulation, but be of good Cheer, I have overcome the World.*

It is also very far from the true Design of the Christian Religion, to debase or to degrade us from that Dignity of human Nature, of which it is capable, by due Regard and Application of those Means which the Mercy of God has afforded, to exalt us from the fallen and miserable

miserable Estate of wretched and sinful Creatures, to become the Children of God, through *Jesus Christ* our Lord, whose Words are left with us for that Purpose, that by living according to them, and following his Example, we may be received up from Earth, into his Kingdom in Heaven.

But in order to attain this great Advancement of our Nature, our Minds must be suited to our present Circumstances, and we must not conceive we are already possessed of that Dignity, to which we are now only capable of making distant Approaches; since the utmost we can do at present to be assured of it, is to endeavour patiently and faithfully to obey the Word of God, with Reverence and godly Fear; so that if we may be accepted through our sincere Repentance, and are taken into the Favour of God, to be acknowledged as his Sons through the Merits of our holy and blessed Redeemer, this Excellency and Honour will depend upon our Humility, and daily Applications to the Throne of God's Grace, to continue and preserve us in it.

This Phrase of the Dignity of human Nature, as it is found at present among the technical Terms of moralizing Enthusiasts in Religion, may well serve as a Recommendation of their Discourses; for every Man who reads them, may seize upon it for his own Use, since it's Meaning is not confined among them, by any particular Explanation: But altho' we allow of the exceeding great Dignity and Excellence of human Nature, as being related to the Son of God, who took our Nature upon him, that we *should be fellow Heirs, and of the same Body;* yet

yet we are by no Means warranted to say, this Dignity appertains to Men, who disregard or despise that Relation, *even denying the Lord that bought them*; nor can we allow this mighty Privilege does belong to the Profane, and the Unbelievers, to the false and the rash and common Swearers, to the Whoremongers, and Adulterers whom God will judge. This Excellency and Honour of human Nature, will not be bestowed on the Covetous whom God abhorreth, upon the proud and unthankful, and unmerciful Ones of the Earth, however distinguished by worldly Acquisitions, it will not be found with the Envious or Uncharitable, or Railers or Drunkards, or among the Societies of Thieves or Gamesters; so that if these sort of Persons believe they are possessed of universal Benevolence, and the Dignity of human Nature, they conceive themselves intitled to something, for which they are indebted to their own Imaginations, or to the Reasonings of the *Deists*, their Teachers in Opposition to the Truth revealed, and fully declared in the Word of God.

But howsoever the Truth may be opposed, and the Word of God tried to the uttermost, we are sure, *the Words of the Lord are pure Words, as Silver tried in a Furnace of Earth, purified seven Times*; and that the greatest Trials it can meet with, will not be able to shake the Foundation of that Church, for which we have his Promise, that *the Gates Hell shall not prevail against it*; those Gates which have been laid wide open for the whole Host of the Enemy to pass through; from whence all Lies and
H Forgeries,

Forgeries, all Offences and Impostures have proceeded, to oppose, corrupt and suppress the Faith; by numberless Inventions of false Gods, and Forms of idolatrous Worship, suitable to the Tempers and Complexions, and Imaginations of the different Nations of the Earth; by forged Miracles and lying Wonders; by false Apostles, and false Prophets, making false Representations of the true God, and of the reasonable Service which is due to him; by depriving him of his Honour to give it to his Creatures worshipped as Gods, protecting or interceding for Mankind, as Angels or Saints, or Souls of departed Men; by Rage and Cruelty and Murders, let loose upon the Earth in Persecutions, to supplant the Truth by Torture and Violence, and to establish Error in its Place: by *Antichrist* exalted into the Seat of God, as Head of his Church, holding out false Keys to Heaven; by the infernal Arts and Policies of the Fraternity usurping the Holy Name of *Jesus*, to cover the Design, *when Satan himself is transformed into an Angel of Light*; by bold and blasphemous Attempts to pervert the Word of God; by deceitful Mixtures of it, from the proud, impure, and abortive Conceits of self-sufficient Enthusiasts; by direct and violent Attacks upon the Authority of God's Word, to confound, or to resolve it into mere human Authority, and to set it at variance with itself: by Swarms of heretical and schismatical Disputants in Sects, endeavouring to taint and render suspicious the Creeds, Articles, Orders, and Liturgy of that Church, whose Establishment in these Kingdoms, is rested upon the Warrant and Authority of holy Scripture; by

by false Brethren, Scoffers, and Mockers, walking after their own Lusts, and calling in Question the Promises of God; by Crouds of *Deists*, *Atheists*, and *Libertines*, with serious and solemn Lies, disguised under Masques of Charity, combating with the Truth, or by Raillery, and Wit and Humour, and Ridicule, attempting to baffle and amuse, to mislead, and to pervert the Understandings, and to stupify the wounded Consciences, and to destroy the Souls of Men.

To conclude, as we know, *it must needs be, that Offences come*, and from whence they arise, to what Purpose they are sent abroad, and what Consequences of Wo and Misery they have produced in the World: it concerns us to lay hold on that Comfort which the Mercy of God has afforded to support us, under all the Difficulties and Distresses, and the perplexed Appearances of Affairs in this Life, whether we consider them in a publick, or in a private Respect.

In the former View of them as concerning the great Movements, in ballancing of temporal Power, among the several States and Kingdoms of the World, although at present, *all the Earth is full of Darkness and cruel Habitations*, yet for our Comfort under these Considerations, we know *the Lord is King, the Earth may be glad thereof, yea the Multitude of the Isles may be glad thereof*, for when it corresponds to the Purposes of his great Mercy to Mankind in the Government of them, *he stilleth the raging of the Sea, and the Noise of his Waves, and the Madness of the People.*

But if in respect to our private Condition we suffer by Injuries and Afflictions brought upon us by the Wickedness or Injustice of other Men, we know in our present corrupted State, no Man has Reason to expect he should escape such Trials and Temptations: And if Sickness or Old Age and Infirmities and worldly Crosses bear hard upon us, our Faith will still support us under God's Grace, even without the Prospect of present Relief, for we know *the Time is short, for the Fashion of this World passeth away.*

Lastly, when we appear in Defence of our Faith, violently assaulted by unbelieving wicked Men, who are guided by the subtil Enemy of their Souls to fulfil his Purposes; we are not intitled to bring *a Railing Accusation against them before the Lord*, as if we ourselves were innocent of giving any Offence, and had a Right to Triumph over them by the Strength and Soundness of our own Reason and Understandings; neither must we betake ourselves to those Weapons of our own Invention, by which we are most inclined to exert our Skill and Abilities in controversial Combat:

But as being aware that we shall ever be provoked by the Enemy, to enter the Lists with him in that spacious Field of Reasoning upon the Works of God independently of his Word, in which he has always continued to obtain his Triumphs over the Understandings of Men; it is our Duty to confess our own Weakness and Insufficiency, by applying to the Fountain of Wisdom and Truth in the Word of God, and seeking by his Grace from thence only to derive the Weapons of our Spiritual Warfare;

fare ; as knowing that *all Scripture is given by Inspiration of God, and is profitable for Doctrine, for Reproof, for Correction, for Instruction in Righteousness, that the Man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good Works*: And in regard to any Scruples or Difficulties that may arise in his Mind, concerning the important Truths or Doctrines of Religion, which may be denied or controverted by unfaithful Men, he has yet farther an exprefs Promise of Assurance from our blessed Lord, who hath told us, *if any Man will do his Will, he shall know of the Doctrine whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself*, if any Man will do the Will of God as declared in the moral Law and by the Prophets, he shall know of the peculiar Doctrine of the Gospel, whether it be the Doctrine of God, or whether I speak of myself as a Man, such as the *Ebionites, Arians, Socinians*, or other like Hereticks would suppose me to be. In which Words we have a Condemnation of their Heresies, as exprefs and particular, as might be consistent with the Majesty of divine Wisdom and Knowledge to pronounce against them, and likewise an Assurance, that every Man who means to do his Duty with an honest Heart, shall have the Comfort also of being assisted by the Grace of God, to remove the Offences that may be cast in his Way, to hinder him from believing in the Name of *Christ*.

As for those who search the Scriptures for the sake of Controversy, without having an honest Heart and Mind to live according to the Truth, they have no Promise to assure them, that they will ever attain to the Knowledge of it.

But that no Man may be surprised, or unprepared for the Assaults of our spiritual Enemies, we have the whole Duty of a faithful Soldier and Servant of *Christ*, summed up by the Apostle, who understood their Degrees and their Numbers and the Danger and the Subtilty of their Approaches, and is therefore very earnest to prepare us in the best Manner to withstand them, according to his Exhortation of the Brethren at *Ephesus*: *Finally my Brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the Power of his Might, put on the whole Armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the Wiles of the Devil, for we wrestle not against Flesh and Blood, but against Principalities, against Powers, against the Rulers of the Darknes of this World, against Spiritual Wickedness in high Places; wherefore take unto you the whole Armour of God, that ye may be able to stand in the evil Day, and having done all to stand; stand therefore, having your Loins girt about with Truth, and having on the Breast-plate of Righteousness, and your Feet shod with the Preparation of the Gospel of Peace, above all taking the Shield of Faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery Darts of the Wicked; and take the Helmet of Salvation, and the Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.*

Praying always with all Prayer, and Supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all Perseverance, and Supplication for all Saints, to keep them from the evil One, and from the evil World. Amen.

F I N I S.

